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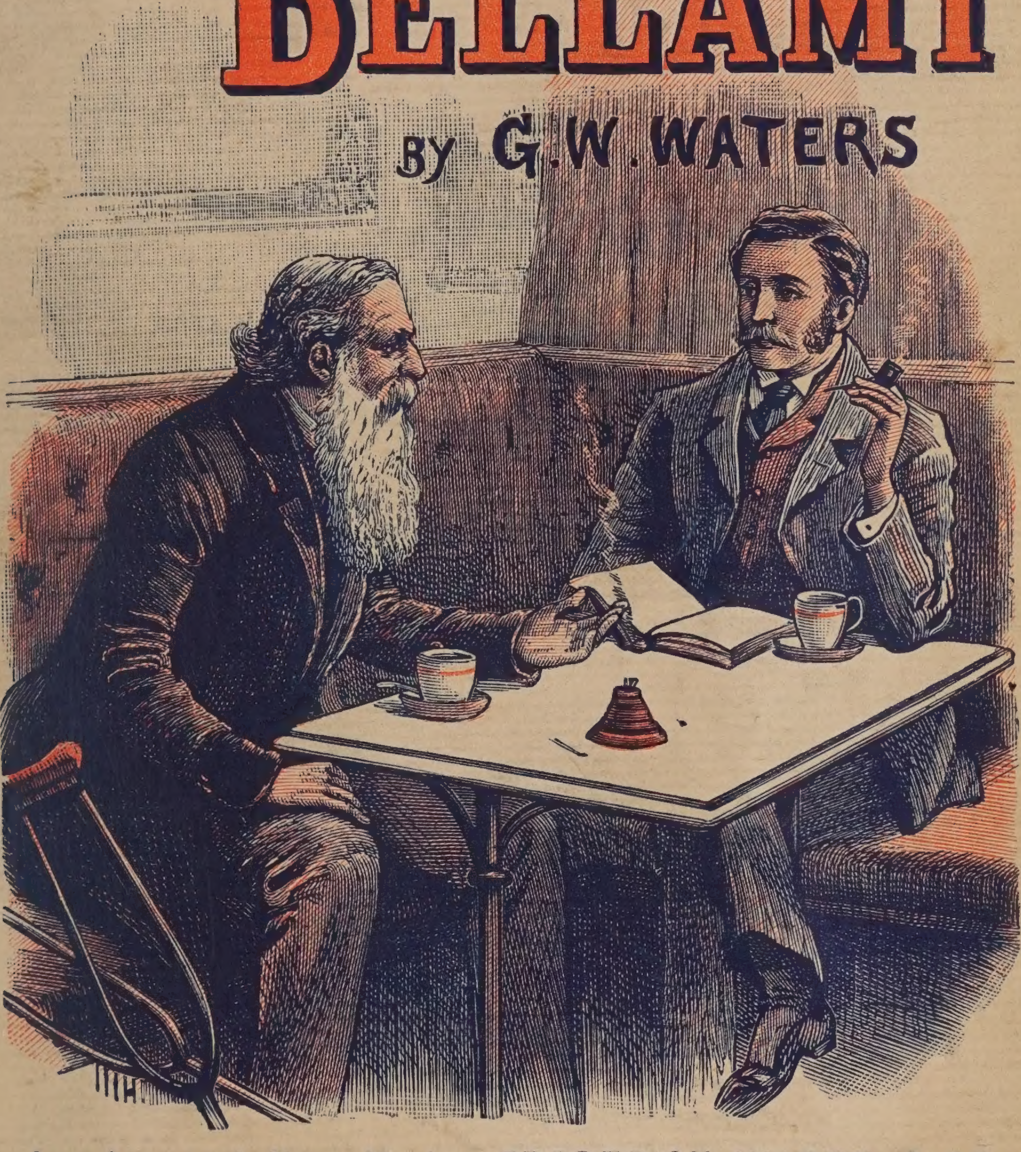
MY FRIEND BELLAMY

BY G. W. WATERS



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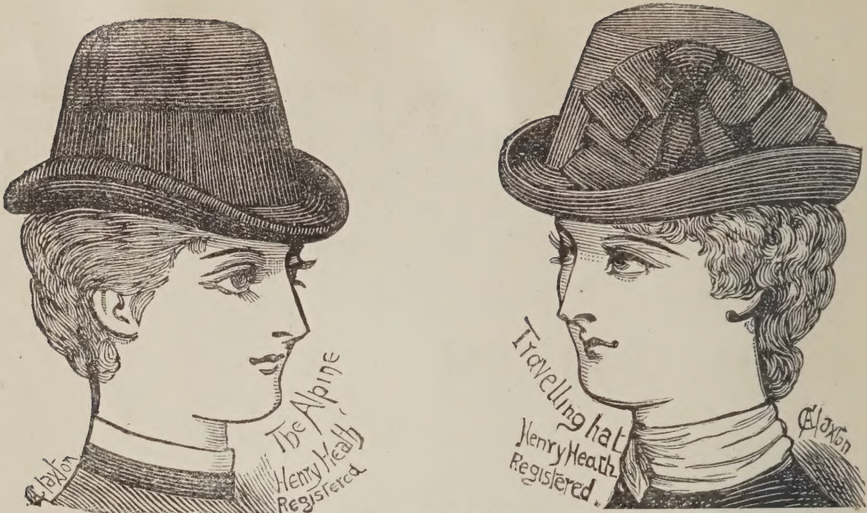
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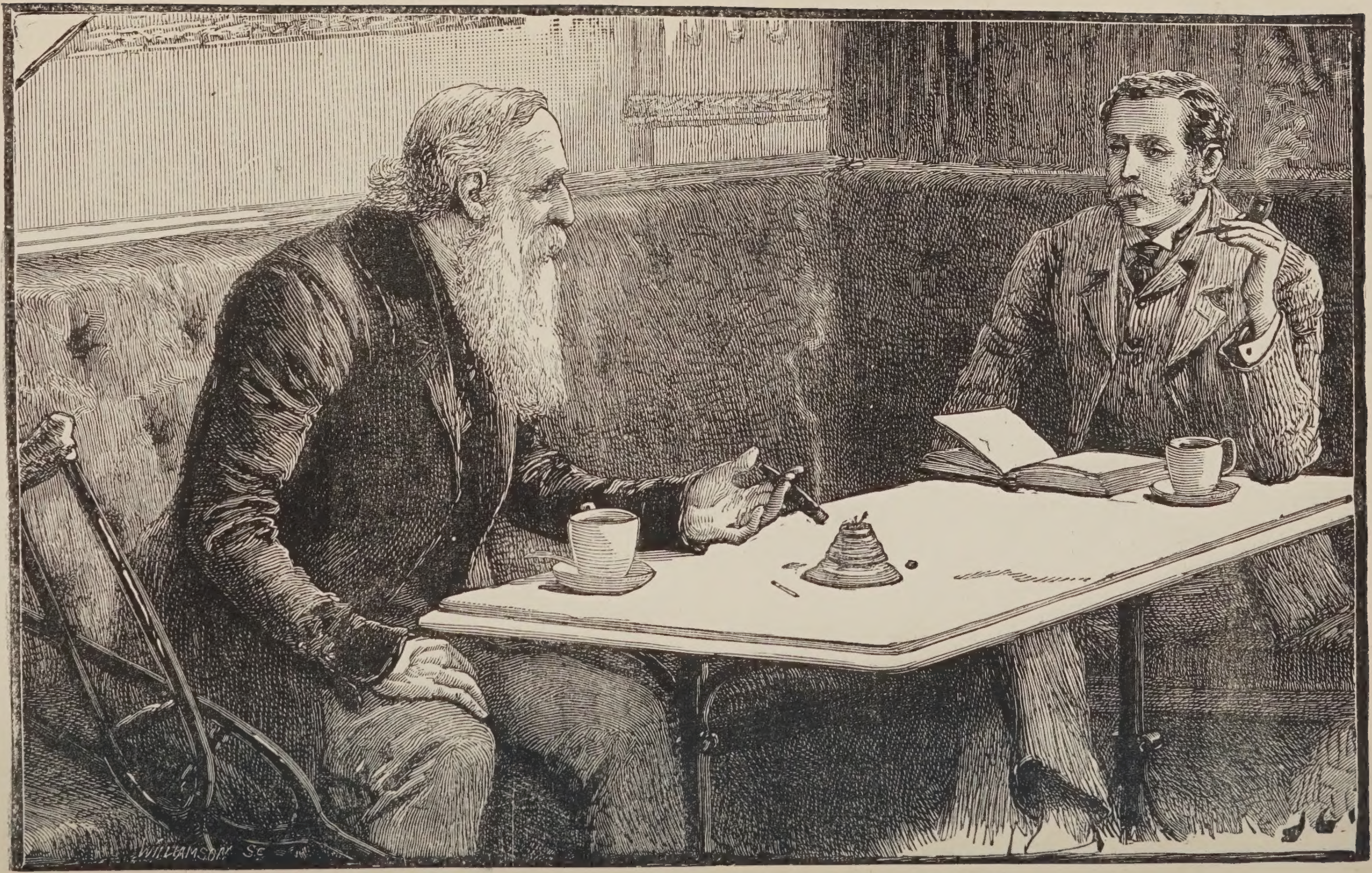
"MY FRIEND BELLAMY."


WILLIAMSON Sc

"I WAS SOON *EN RAPPORT* WITH MY NEW ACQUAINTANCE."

MY FRIEND BELLAMY.

BY

W. G. WATERS.

WITH ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON AND NEW YORK:
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.

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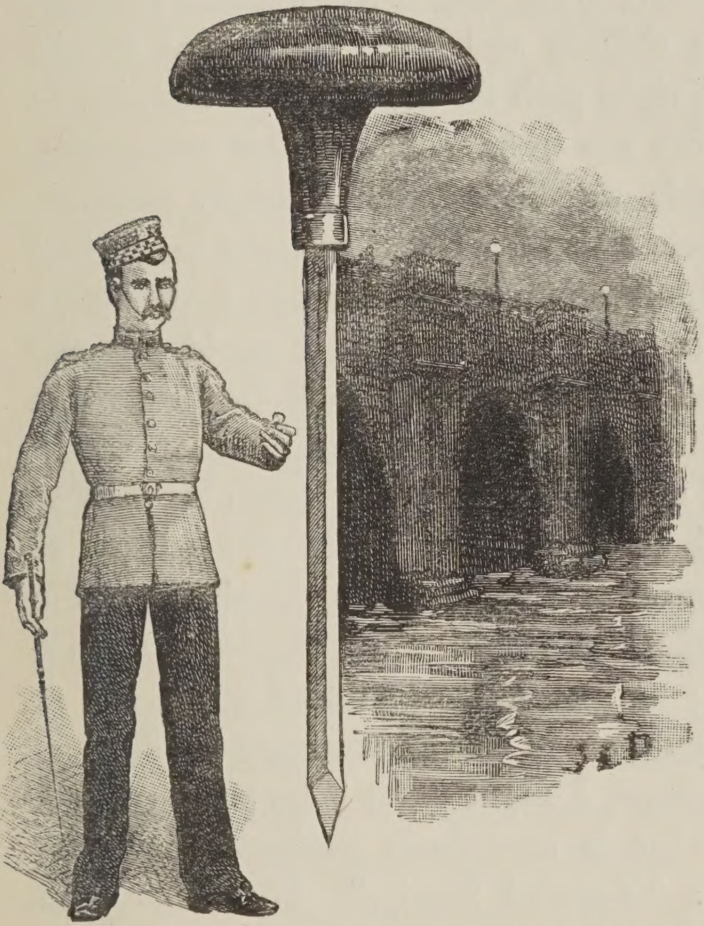
"MY FRIEND BELLAMY."

CHAPTER I.

AN INTERESTING STRANGER.



THE calling by which I earn my daily bread is that of a working engraver. I do not describe myself as an engraver pure and simple, lest I should create an impression that I spend my time in the production of plates from which are struck off artist proofs and proofs before the letter of the great painters' master-pieces. I confess there was a time when my ambition fired me to flights as lofty as those I have named, when I should have scouted the idea of working year after year at the lower branch of the engraver's profession; but the general sternness of the life-struggle in these modern days, and the prospect of having ere long to make choice between the Queen's shilling and Waterloo Bridge, taught me that the right path for me to follow was that in which a living was to be won, and that aspirations, however noble, would never fill an empty stomach. By this severe discipline I was brought to see that the Holy Families and Madonnas and Lady Bettys were not for me; that, though I could ply the burin as well as or better than half the men with an established reputation—at least so my vanity told me—I must leave to other hands the task of reproducing in black and white the effects of Turner's sunsets and the roses on the cheeks of Sir Joshua's belles. I sought work, therefore, upon a lower level; and even here I found it did not at first come upon me in an embarrassing flood.

Here, perhaps, I ought to let it be known that I belong to what is sometimes euphemistically described as a "decayed family." My father, who came of good Irish stock, was a Captain in the Line, and my mother was the daughter of a Yorkshire cloth manufacturer in a large way of business, and reputed rich. Whether this reputation was deserved or not, one thing was certain: he did not part with much of his wealth in dowering his daughter; and, as my father kept up exactly the same style of living as a married man with a family as he had maintained when a bachelor, he naturally very soon ran into debt. But this did not trouble him, for he had all his life been on familiar terms with stamped paper and its uses, and the tradesmen, knowing something of my mother's family, were not unduly pressing with their little accounts.

But things wore a very different aspect when my grandfather failed for a quarter of a million, and blew out his brains rather than face his angry creditors. All my father's golden dreams of deliverance from his embarrassments were dispelled. He sold out, satisfied his creditors the best he could, and retired with a pittance to end his days at Bruges.

This was the industrial crisis of my life. Before I was out of my teens I was suddenly brought face to face with the fact that any of this world's goods I might wish to enjoy I must earn for myself. A family conclave was held to pronounce on my future, and the opinion concerning me which found most favour with my friends was that I was good for nothing. I possessed, however, a certain facility for drawing, so I was sent by the contributions of my uncles and cousins to learn the art and mystery of engraving.

My 'prentice days were not very happy ones. It was a terrible fall for my ambition that I should have to earn my living by making marks upon a metal plate instead of putting on that red coat of which I had begun to dream before I left the nursery; but after a little I took a liking to my craft, and made rapid progress. When I was sufficiently the master of it I set up in the world on my own account, and very soon a lucky chance gave me some good friends, who were able to throw work in my way, and all that came to me I did honestly and well, though I must say some of my early commissions were not at all to my taste. One was, I remember, to engrave an elaborate and involved bill-heading for an eminent monumental mason, in which I managed to mix up in "an admired disorder" representations of the tombs of all nations and ages of the world's history. The pyramids and obelisks of Egypt, the cenotaphs and cinerary urns of classic times were framed in a border of weeping willows and cypress wreaths, while here and there ladies in the deepest mourning garb and loosened back hair hid their tears and their faces as well, as they bent over the richly sculptured tomb or the commonplace contemporary headstone.

For a wholesale stationer I did a set of plates illustrative of the watering-places of England, to be used in the embellishment of local note paper. I shall always suspect that the artist who furnished the sketches for these was not a man of honour. So strong was the resemblance between all his piers and his marine parades that I inclined to the belief that he painted them one and all from his early recollections of Margate or Southend. In any case he made me hate most cordially those straddle-legged piers, those cube-shaped villas, and those gaunt ranges of sea front houses which he had foisted on his too confiding employer. By degrees, however, work of a better sort came in—views for guide books and occasional frontispieces for biographies and books of travel; but the main stay of my business I found in plates of fine delicate work used in printing the share and scrip certificates of railway and joint stock companies. I did not get rapidly rich, but my work increased year by year, and as I was naturally of a sanguine disposition I was happy enough, and untroubled by fears for the future. The love of reading, fostered by the solitary life I led, grew to be my ruling passion, and by the time my mind had fully matured I knew thoroughly the works of many authors whose names would probably never have reached my ears had I been favoured by what I once deemed good fortune, and been clothed in a scarlet coat. My place of business was in Farringdon Street, I lodged out in Camberwell; and, as I always performed the journey from one of these points to the other with mill-horse regularity, I saw hardly anything of the more or less fashionable quarters of the town. New London grew up around me, and I was very little the wiser. Columbia Market I have never seen to this day, and the Albert Hall when I first set eyes upon it must have completed the first decade of its existence. It, however, happened on a certain evening in November, 18——, I found myself compelled to depart from my usual routine, and, instead of turning my steps towards Camberwell, to pay a visit to a customer who dwelt in the parts of Soho. We had several business matters to arrange, and it was past my usual supper time when I turned my steps homewards. My midday meal had been a very light one, and, feeling rather famished, I determined to indulge in the inexpensive dissipation of a French dinner at one of the restaurants of the locality. These stood so thickly about me that I was rather embarrassed in my choice; but I finally pitched, for no particular reason, upon the Grand Circassian Café and Divan.

On entering I found few signs of the Oriental splendour which one might have expected from the name over the door. It was a long, dreary room, with a glass-and-bottle laden counter at one end, behind which sat a young lady with a head of hair wrought in a wondrous fashion. As I entered she glared at me in such forbidding wise that I believe I should have turned and gone dinnerless away, but for the advent of a little Italian waiter, who shuffled up to me and thrust into my hand the *carte du jour*. In answer to my first inquiries he informed me that I could have anything I liked; but when I began to particularise I found that everything I pitched upon was either "just off," or would take twenty minutes to prepare. Then many of the dishes in their foreign guise were profound mysteries to me, and I feared to make trial of their composition, so my French dinner finally resolved itself into a beef steak and potatoes.

During my meal I sat absorbed over a volume of Defoe, which I had picked up at a bookstall on my way. I was almost undisturbed, for the Grand Circassian Café and Divan did not seem to be doing a roaring trade—at any rate on this particular evening. Several foreign gentlemen swaggered in and exchanged some phrases of elegant *badinage* with the young lady at the counter, who unbent to them most graciously, though they did no more for the good of the house on this particular visit than to help themselves to toothpicks. At a table in a corner two Frenchmen who had been dining were making a great noise over a game of dominoes; but I settled myself over my pipe and book and cup of coffee, and read on in spite of their clatter.

As the evening went on divers persons, evidently *habitués,* came in, but I took little heed of them. At last on looking up I perceived that the table immediately in front of me was occupied by a venerable-looking old gentleman with a most benevolent expression of countenance, and the handsomest white beard I ever saw.

His eyes met mine, and I divined at once that he was of a communicative nature; but I was so deeply absorbed in my reading that I felt indisposed to make any essay in conversation. I ordered another cup of coffee, but I had scarcely re-settled myself when I was disturbed by a noise opposite; and, looking up, I saw the old gentleman struggling in vain to reach a match-box which stood at the remote end of his table. Then I noticed for the first time a pair of crutches standing beside him, and judging that he was a cripple, I rose and placed the matches close to him.

The old man thanked me most courteously, and from the tone in which he spoke and the friendly look in his eyes, I could see that he was dying for a chat. There was something, too, in his manner and appearance which greatly took my fancy; and, potent as were the attractions of my book and pipe, I moved my coffee over to the adjoining table, and was soon *en rapport* with my new acquaintance.

He was, as I have before remarked, a particularly handsome man, and he was besides evidently a man of breeding and refinement. I never listened to a softer or more melodious speaking voice than his was, and as he talked a kindly smile overspread his whole countenance. I found, too, that he was conversant with subjects such as one hardly expects to find within the range of frequenters of Circassian divans, and places of like character. He began with music; but here he found I soon began to flounder out of my depth, so he turned the conversation with perfect ease to painting. Just at that time the collections of a certain Marquis were being sold by auction, and to hear the old gentleman talk about them one would have fancied that he must have seen them every day for the last twenty years. He compared the prices they were now fetching with those paid by the collector when they were purchased, and he grew particularly eloquent over some rare engravings, by an early Dutch master, which had been sold the day previous, and here I could meet him on equal terms, for I had a little time before picked up a damaged copy of one of this engraver's prints, and the topic had as much interest for me, *qua* worker, as for my companion, *qua* virtuoso.

"Ah, I see you know something of engraving," he said, with a ring of eagerness in his voice. I blushed, and felt a little relieved that I had no longer to carry on a conversation in which I was so distinctly at a disadvantage, as I replied,— "I'm afraid I know next to nothing of the history of engraving. I have a fancy for these old Dutch and German workers, and always pick up any bit of theirs which I see going cheap. Engraving is my trade."

"Indeed. You have been taught the art, then? Would that my parents and guardians had done so much for me! I scratch a little myself, just as I do everything else, in a feeble, amateurish fashion. You love your art, I am sure."

"I am grateful to it," I replied, "since it gives me my bread, and I love it as I love art in all its phases. I never cared much about art till I became a poor man."

"So then my first impression of you was right! When I saw you take your book out of your pocket, I said to myself, 'That man is a gentleman, and has known better days.'"

"I hope at least that the first part of your reflection is true," I replied, with a laugh; "as to better days, I think I am as well off now as ever I was."

"I am delighted to hear you say so. Now in your proper person you are, according to your own confession, a proof of a pet theory of mine, one I can never get accepted by the Yahoos one meets in general intercourse. How often does one hear the sneer about beggarly daubers and the like; and how a certain man is poor because he is an artist. I, on the contrary, maintain that a man only becomes a true artist through poverty, because he has been driven by *dira necessitas* to seek in art a consolation ten times more satisfying than any the modern Midas can find in all his unlimited spending."

I did not quite accept the logic of my new friend; but he had at least hit my own case, and that was enough for me.

"I quite agree with you," I replied, assenting. "I myself began to find solace in art when I had no longer five-pound notes to spend on what I used to call pleasure. The uses of adversity to me have been sweet. Had it not come to me, I might very possibly have been dining at Verreys, or shooting pheasants in Norfolk, or riding with the Pytchley, with no more appreciation of a Marc Antonio or a Tempesta than that waiter there."

The old gentleman looked at me rather steadily and seriously for a moment. I fancied he suspected I was quizzing him, but the sweet smile soon came back. "Ah! I see I have indeed found a disciple after my own heart," he said. "I know well all the temptations of youth, my dear young friend. I am a poor old cripple now; but there was a time when, in the words of old Flaccus, *Non sine gloria*—you know what follows. You had better rest content with art for a mistress. She will never betray you;

never lead you into mischief as those other bright-eyed, white-armed charmers have a trick of doing."

I smiled assent to my companion's proposition; and, encouraged by this, he went off again at full speed, demonstrating to me how sure a shield of virtue was art, and what an easy task I should find it to keep all the commandments if I went regularly to South Kensington, and made myself perfect both in the practice and literature of my art. I soon saw that the old man was a little mad, as all real enthusiasts generally are; but he was none the less entertaining on that account. I could not help, however, being more and more impressed that the Circassian Divan was rather a funny place wherein to meet a man who might have posed as a high priest of æstheticism, had æstheticism been invented in the days of which I am writing.

As if he divined what was passing in my mind, he broke in, "Ah, I see you are wondering why I come here to a sordid place like this; my friend, you do not know what the tedium of a dull room is, where every motion gives discomfort, if not pain. To come here is my sole relaxation, for here I meet every night a few friends, men who can talk with me about the things that interest me. Old friends for the most part; but I hope I may reckon on having added to their number to-night."

I responded at once, and told him how delighted I was to have met him.

"And I shall hope to see some of your work," he went on. "I'm too much of a cripple to call on you, so you must bring it here."

I was rather taken aback at this suggestion, for I did not much relish the idea of exhibiting, as samples of my art, debenture certificates of the Patagonian Grand Trunk Railway, or such like work.

"Bring anything," he said; "I can judge from a bill-heading or a tradesman's card, just as well as from the most complicated drapery or flesh work; and if I do not find you too much my master, I may perhaps some day show you something of my own."

I left soon after this, for two or three men had come into the room during our conversation, and they all of them gave my companion a salute as they passed. I was unwilling to be in the way now that the time for his evening chat had come. As I bade him good-bye he put in my hand a visiting card, upon which I read the words, "Mr. Eugene Bellamy;" and I, on my part, promised to come back the next evening, and let him see some samples of my engraving.

CHAPTER II.

MR. BELLAMY ASKS ADVICE.

I LIVED such a regular and uneventful life, I had so few intimate friends, that the addition of a speaking acquaintance to their number was in itself an episode; and I could but feel that the man I had met to-night was not an ordinary personage. I thought much of him as I walked home through the thickening fog, and as I sat over my plate next day. Here was an instance how completely the dense conglomerate mass of human existence around us shuts us in with estranging walls from all knowledge of hundreds of lives, each one of which would furnish from its varied record a theme for the most absorbing drama or romance.

Caret sacer vates. Even Saul among the prophets could hardly have presented a more striking contrast than was furnished by my white-headed sage, sitting with the domino-playing, absinthe-drinking Frenchmen, from whom he must have taken his friends. I pictured him as one like Faustus; one who had vainly made trial of all the philosophies.

Into what dim abysses of doubt and speculation might not those grave, kindly eyes have peered! Well! he at least, would soon, in the course of Nature, solve the great enigma. In those days I used to feel very keenly the want of intellectual companionship; of some sympathetic friend with whom I might discuss my scheme of existence, my doubts and my aspirations. I have before described how Fortune, having dealt me what most men would have called an ill blow, gave me compensation in driving me back upon the simple and satisfying pleasures of reading; and I had not read long before I began to think for myself, and then what mincemeat I made of the exploded superstitions and fossilised creeds and institutions which had hitherto enslaved mankind, myself included. No one who has not gone through such a crisis can realise how strong, on the part of the neophyte, is his desire to communicate his experiences, or how impatiently I longed to lay before Mr. Eugene Bellamy my systems of philosophy—political and social.

On the next day I gave over work an hour sooner than usual, and in addition to the collection of examples of my daily toil, I got together in my head a supplementary selection of abstract questions, and my own opinions there anent, to be fired off if opportunity should favour me, as soon as our exclusively art gossip should come to an end.

When I arrived at the Grand Circassian Café and Divan I found my sage already in his place, and I was, I will confess, a little flattered at the anxiety he displayed to look at my work. I naturally thought most of the decorative examples, of the seaside views and the guidebook illustrations; but Mr. Bellamy, I observed, took little heed of these. They were pretty enough, he remarked, but his estimate of an engraver's merit would always be given for less showy samples, which at the same time demanded far more care and attention; such work, for instance, as I had put into the plate from which the certificates of the Santa Anna Silver Mining Company had been struck off, or the first mortgage bonds of the San Juan del Picador Railway. That was the sort of work whereby to judge of a man's power over his tool; and from the praise he lavished on my scrolled and wavy groundwork, and the imposing national emblems of the more impecunious Spanish American States, I gathered that his estimate of my powers was a very favourable one.

"Give me work like this as the true test of a man's power over his tool," he said, as he held up a plate to the light. "Now, I dare say you often look in at the print-shop windows, and wish it might fall in your way to get employment in producing the stuff which the British public is always ready to buy. Believe me when I tell you that not two of the men who engrave Academy pictures, and get well paid for them too, could show any work like that."

"I confess I do," I replied, with a laugh. "You must remember, however, there is another side of the picture. These gentlemen can't do my work, perhaps; but then, I can't do theirs."

"A little practice—a very little practice—and you would beat the best of them," Mr. Bellamy answered. Now, though I had told myself the first time I met the old gentleman that he was an amiable lunatic, I must confess that I listened with great pleasure to this discourse. I had never been spoilt by flattery, and as he went on praising the samples of my work that I placed before him, I thought he was the most delightful person I had ever met in all my life.

We sat talking some time before any opportunity came for me to bring forward my views on abstract matters, and to try and get at my companion's opinions concerning certain subjects which lay outside the range of the senses. By the way of introduction I began to discuss a book, recently published by a well-known man of science, which supported strongly the view I myself had adopted, and at the same time fluttered considerably the dovecotes of orthodoxy; but, before the subject was fairly broached, we were joined by a tall, bearded man, one of those I had noticed on the previous evening, and to him my companion made me known as a valued young friend; but he mentioned not the tall man's name, nor my own either. For this latter omission, however, there was good reason, seeing that he did not know it himself.

The tall man did not favour us long with his company. He spoke a few words in French to my companion, and shook his head in a mournful manner, as if the world was not going well with him, and then went off to join a group of others, shabby and tristful as himself, who had congregated in another corner of the room. The old man shook his head as he glanced at the party. "I dare say you can guess what their game is," he whispered to me. "Patriotism! They have all hit upon a different plan of regeneration for their respective fatherlands, but they seem latterly to be all coming round to the belief that it will be necessary to massacre one-half of the world in order to save the other."

My heart gave a leap of excitement at finding myself, if not a real conspirator, at least in the same room with some of the most bloody-minded of the tribe. "And are they Communists, or Nihilists, or anything of that kind?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know what they call themselves; but Nihilists wouldn't be a bad name for them, seeing that they are always going to do something which turns out to be nothing after all."

"Are they French, or Italian, or what?"

"Oh, some of all sorts. They're a funny set. Most of them would not hurt a mouse in private life, and yet to hear them talk sometimes of the methods they propose to employ to set the world right is enough to make your hair stand on end."

"Do they come here every night?" I asked.

"There is a lot of coming and going in the movement. One day Luders—that's the man who spoke to us—is sent to Messina, and the next day a stranger arrives from Verviers. It seems to me as if the railways got more out of the movement than the suffering peoples, at any rate at present. They don't look very happy over it all, do they?"

"No, indeed; but men can't help looking worried when they know that the policeman might be wanting them any minute."

"No, that is so. Ah, well, there will always be restless spirits in the world; but what a pity it is, my young friend, that men cannot be content, as you and I are, with the consolations of Art and Philosophy—for you are a philosopher I am sure from what you were saying when our melancholy friend interrupted us. Well, some day we will have a talk about the Infinite, and the Eternal Energies, and the Inconceivable Realities, but just now I want to make a confession to you, and to ask your advice."

To ask my advice! This grey-haired man, who spoke familiarly of subjects I knew not even by name! Was it humble-mindedness on his part—I had often heard that the greatest men were most given that way—or was it real appreciation of some hitherto-undiscovered merit of mine?

"I have in hand a literary work which will, I hope, leave some impression upon the sands of Time," he went on. "No mere ephemeral scribbling. It is a reprint with notes, of a rare old translation of the poems of the Minnesingers. A good friend of mine, whom I hope you will see before long, has helped me with the notes and comments. It is to be printed in the most sumptuous fashion, with all the original engravings and initial letters, and it is about these latter that I want your advice, for they are my particular care."

I could of course only say that my advice, as far as it might be of any use, was very much at my companion's service.

"Ah," said Mr. Bellamy, with his most pleasant smile, "but I fear you will soon find out that I am one of those people who want the ell directly the inch is given, or even before. Before you give me your advice I am going to ask you for something else. I want the help of your delicate fingers. I have finished myself all the plates for the initial letters, save one, and this one, the most beautiful of them all, has completely baffled me. There is work in it which is, I must confess, quite beyond my powers; but to you it would be child's play, and no more. I am quite certain on this point, after what you have shown me this evening."

"I'm afraid you rate my skill too highly," I replied.

"No, not at all. Have you any particular engagement on Wednesday evening? If not you might meet me here, and accompany me back to my rooms, and then we will have a chat after you have cast your eye over what I have done as an engraver myself."

I had nothing for the day Mr. Bellamy named, so I at once assented to his proposal. We seemed to be old friends already.

"I shall be only too happy," I replied; "I have very few friends in London, and nearly always spend my evenings alone."

"That is not as it should be," Mr. Bellamy answered, "you ought to mix with men who are as cultivated as yourself. Well, well, I am afraid I bore you with my amateur craze for engraving; but on Wednesday night I will introduce you to a dear friend of mine, a man deeply read in all the learning of Germany, and you will find in him a kindred spirit or I'm much mistaken."

Though I felt a little bashful at the prospect of bringing out my cherished theories of life and morals for the criticism of Mr. Bellamy's omniscient friend, I could not help feeling grateful to the lucky chance which had first led me towards the Grand Circassian Café. If it should end by adding to my scanty stock of acquaintances, a man so interesting as Mr. Bellamy, and another so learned as the friend he talked of, it would be such a chance as does not come often to men in the course of their lives. I gathered together my specimens of work and took my leave; all the next day I could not help feeling impatient for the hour to come for my next visit to the Grand Circassian Café. I felt also an active curiosity to see what Mr. Bellamy's home might be like. I could not fancy him as a man of "domesticated habits," indeed, he seemed to me to be altogether out of place in our crowded common-place London.

Such a man one ought rather to find in some quaint old house, in a sleepy provincial town, surrounded by books and pictures and scientific instruments. I even went so far as to fancy that he ought to dabble a little in the occult sciences, and to prepare myself to find diagrams of cabalistic figures scattered about the table, and a stuffed crocodile suspended from the ceiling.

CHAPTER III.

I GET A COMMISSION.

I WAS early at the *café*, but still he was there before me. We sat over our coffee for nearly an hour, for one of the sombre conspirators insisted on telling us at great length how he had been overcharged ninepence after dining at a restaurant in St. Martin's Lane. I became a little impatient, and as soon as the story of the exile's wrongs came to an end, I was glad that Mr. Bellamy made preparations for a move. I called a cab. Mr. Bellamy bade me get in first, and having told the driver where to drive to (I did not catch the name of the street), we set forth.

We threaded first the mazes of Newport Market, and at last, after a journey of many turnings, drew up opposite to an archway in a narrow street, the name of which I failed to note as the cab turned the corner.

We walked under the archway up the court—rather a lengthy one for London, till we arrived at an open triangular space, and, at a door "giving" upon this, my companion knocked.

The door was opened by a short stout man with bow legs and an enormous head, made yet bigger by the fell of dusty hair which hung about it. My companion turned into a room on the right hand, and as I followed I must confess I was fairly astonished to see what manner of room it was.

The ceiling was low, and a richly ornamented cornice ran round the walls, which were almost entirely covered by book-cases. Heavy curtains fell over the window recess, and over the mantelpiece, which was of marble and handsomely carved, hung a fine engraving of "Lo Spozalizio," and on either side of it stood a rather florid specimen of modern French bronze work. There was a massive oak table in the centre of the room covered with books, and a reading lamp at one corner was arranged to serve for any one sitting in a large easy chair placed between it and the fire. There was a cosy, homelike look about the room which would have been noticeable anywhere, and it seemed doubly striking to me, coming as I did into the warmth and light out of the darkness and squalor of the miserable street without.

"You see I make myself tolerably comfortable considering that I live in the slums," said Mr. Bellamy, as he stirred the fire, which sent a warm glow upon the brown backs of the old books on the shelves, and the faded green of the curtains, which were, I now saw, old Genoa velvet. "When one is enclosed for life as I am, one takes a pleasure in getting a few pretty things together. I've collected in almost every line, one time or other, and shall have a lot of curios to show you by-and-bye, but to-night we must confine ourselves to the Minnesingers and their initial letters. Ah! there they are; just put that portfolio of prints on the table, will you?"

I lifted the heavy portfolio that Mr. Bellamy pointed out to me, and placed it on the table. It was locked, and he opened it with a little key that hung from his watch chain. I brought a chair up to the table for him, and then he sat down and began to pore over the contents of the portfolio.

"Here are my treasures," he said as he went on; "wonderful work, aren't they?"

I took the sheet he held out to me, and found it was a photograph. "And the manuscript you were speaking of?" I asked.

"Ah, I haven't got that. My friend to whom it belongs is too much of a bibliomaniac and a man of the world to allow that to go out of his sight, and I must say I think he is wise to be cautious. I would just as soon trust a dowager alone in a room with a lot of old Venetian rose-point lace as a collector of prints with the originals of what you see here."

"Then you don't class yourself as a collector, I hope?" I replied, laughing.

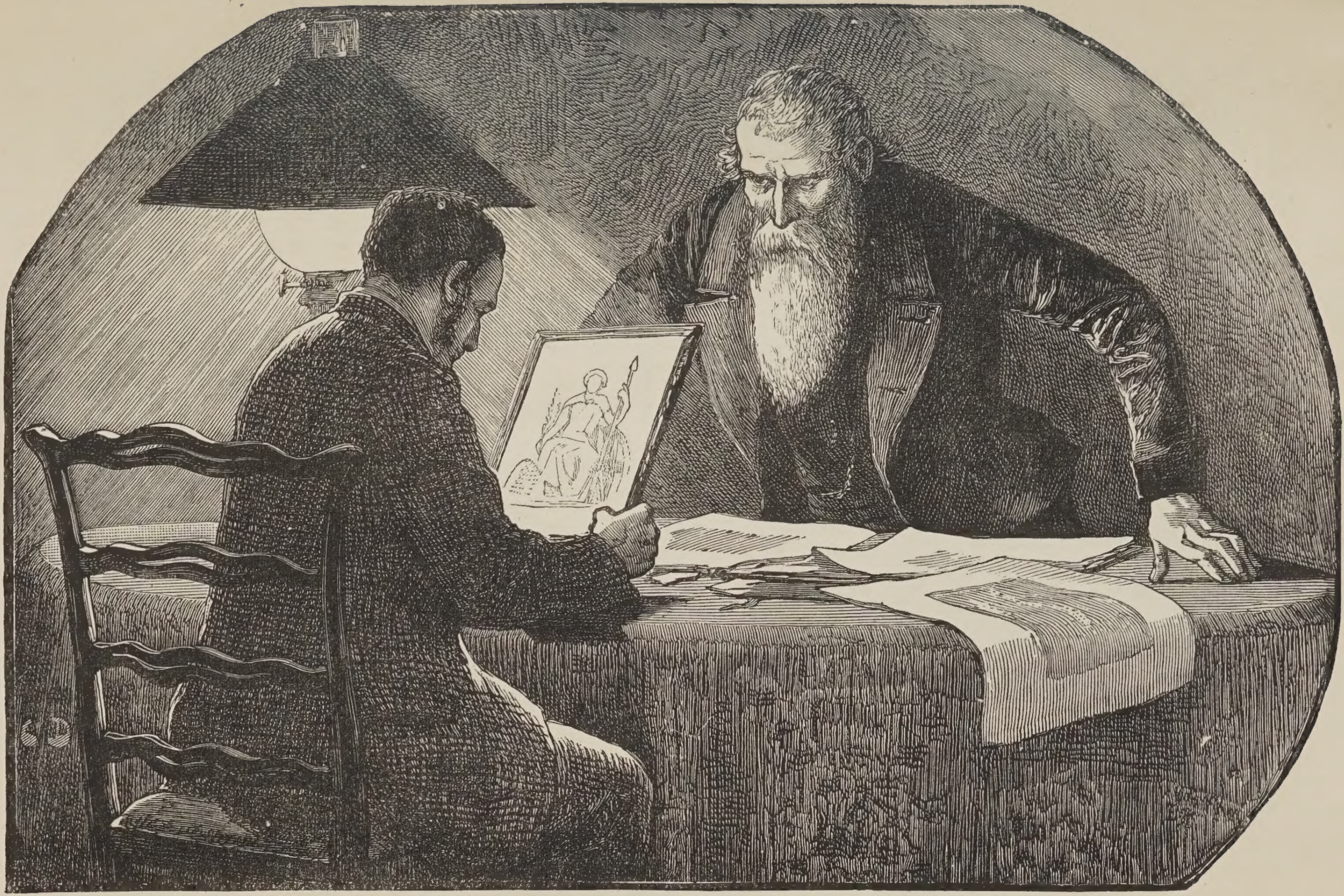
"I don't know, my young friend, I don't know. I wouldn't go bail for my own honesty if I should have free access to certain portfolios I know of," said Mr. Bellamy, with a humorous look. "I don't like to boast of my strength for fear I should fall."

"Then these are photographs of the illustrations?" I said.

"Yes, I think I was very lucky to get him to allow me to have them photographed. As it was he insisted on standing close to the table with his hand almost touching the manuscript while the photographer was at work. Ah, they're a selfish, suspicious set, these collectors!"

I could hardly help laughing at Mr. Bellamy's naïve reproach after the confession he had just made, and I felt that if ever fortune should suffer me to become a virtuoso, I would lay his counsels to heart, and be wary of all brother collectors.

"Look at this one; I have done that, and I made a pretty good plate of this. I'll ask you to cast your eye over it before you leave," he said, as he placed before me some of the photographs, which seemed to be reproductions of etchings either by Albert Durer or one of his followers. "These, I think I may say without vanity, I managed fairly well, and I hope you may be able



MY FRIEND BELLAMY'S ENGRAVINGS.

to confirm my estimate; but the one I told you about I can make nothing of. Ah, these are of no importance—I have no fear about them; but I want you to see the puzzler—the thing that has given me more sleepless nights than are good for me at my time of life. Ah, here it is! this is the design I want you to set about." And as he spoke he drew it out of the heap of photographs and held it out at arm's length for me to inspect.

"No, you can't see it like that. Will you set it up on the mantelpiece, near the corner—that is the best light,—and take a good look at it, and then give me your opinion."

My first glance at it told me that it was entirely different in character from anything I had yet looked at. It certainly could never have been the work of any contemporary of the artist whose drawings I had just turned over. It might have been done by some seventeenth-century Italian; but it looked much more like the work of a living artist. It represented a woman, fair and stately, with a wreath in one hand and a spear in the other, seated on a rock, with the sea in the background. In the calm beauty of face and dignity of figure she was much more like the modern embodiment of the ideal Germania—such as has, of late, taken marble shape so plentifully in many a *Platz* and *Garten* of the Fatherland—than she was like to the amorphous matrons of the artist who had traced the first designs I had looked at.

I took up one of these and held it beside the other, the better to make comparison. As I stood looking at them a noise in the adjoining room made me turn rather suddenly, and as I did so I remarked that Mr. Bellamy's eyes were bent on mine with an intensely keen and enquiring glance. The placid smile which usually overspread his countenance had vanished, and his brow was furrowed with a frown of anxiety. Old man as he was, Mr. Bellamy seemed suddenly to have grown ten years older.

The smile came back again immediately our eyes met. "Ah! I see you are struck with the contrast, just as I was myself," he said. "Now I ask you as an artist, rather than as an engraver, whether those two designs can be the work of the same hand, or even produced in the same century."

"Well," I replied, "with my limited knowledge I hardly like to give an opinion, but to judge from a superficial glance, I should certainly say they cannot."

"Exactly," he said, growing quite excited as he spoke, "we agree so far at any rate."

"But," I interrupted, "if they are not, how is it that they are found in the same manuscript?"

"Ah, that is the question; the question which nearly brought about a quarrel between my friend, to whom the manuscript belongs, and myself; and

I'll tell you my explanation of it. I maintain—and everybody with a grain of sense must agree with me—that the whole of the sheet upon which that drawing stands is a forgery; a comparatively modern insertion put in to replace one cut out; one which, in all probability, contained the finest drawing of the lot. I told my friend so one day; but I thought he would have bitten my head off. He didn't like to think there could be a flaw in the gem of his collection."

"That is rather a common weakness in collectors," I replied; "but if you are sure that this sheet is a forgery, why do you include it in your reproduction? It certainly is quite out of harmony with the earlier work."

"Well, perhaps it is; but I mustn't be too particular on that score: and I have set my heart on producing an exact fac-simile," said the old gentleman, with a benevolent smile. "But what do you think of the thing as a bit of engraving? I maintain it would not have disgraced any period, and that, for modern work, it is very good indeed."

"You are right," I answered. "Whatever it is, it is the work of a true artist. There is a little stiffness about it, such as one sees in David and his followers; but it is probably much older than that."

"Perhaps. Who shall say? But now I want

to tell you a fancy of mine, and to ask you whether you think I have any groundwork for it. I can never get rid of the idea that somebody else has borrowed that face and form, and reproduced them in the present day. Have you never seen anything that recalls that figure to you: something quite commonplace and ordinary? You understand."

I looked closely at the picture some seconds before I answered: "No, I cannot say it does. What a magnificent photograph it is—every line as sharp as ever it can be in the print."

"Yes; it was not done in England. You could not get such a negative as that in a London atmosphere. Now, do you think you could engrave it for me, on a very much reduced scale, to fill up the oval of a capital D, as it does in the original? Could you make a reduction of it no bigger than this?" and, as he spoke, he showed me an oval about two inches in height and one in breadth."

"I never undertook a job of the kind before," I replied; "but I have no doubt I could manage it—that is if you will permit one or two failures at first."

"One or two!—a dozen, if you like," said Mr. Bellamy, laying his hand on my shoulder in a benevolent, fatherly sort of a way. "You will succeed in the end, my friend—I am quite sure of that. So you undertake the job without saying anything about the pay? That would mark you as a true artist, if nothing else did, my dear boy; but you won't get rich like that," he added, with his sweetest smile.

"Oh, you shall give me whatever you think it may be worth. I'll take the photograph back with me to-night, and I'll promise you something to look at the day after to-morrow."

CHAPTER IV.

LOCKED IN.

THE smile gathered more intensely than ever round the corners of the old man's mouth, and a queer twinkle shone in his eyes as he answered.

"Now I am going to ask you to humour an old man's fancy. Though it is rather a strange one, I don't believe I shall ask in vain, for I am sure you are one of the best-tempered young fellows in the world"— and here Mr. Bellamy hesitated, as if diffident whether he might impose on my kindness of heart!

"You are very good," I answered, "to think so well of me on so short an acquaintance. I can assure you I will fall in with your proposition if I possibly can."

"Ah, I am certain you will," he replied. "Well, this proposition of mine is just this—I hope you won't think it very crack-brained—I want you to begin your work here, and finish it here; for I should as soon think of cutting my own throat as of allowing that photograph to leave my keeping; and if you only knew the trouble I had to get it, you would quite appreciate my determination."

Mr. Bellamy paused. So this request of his, about which he seemed so nervous, was nothing so very much out of the way after all. As I looked round the comfortable and luxurious room, I thought that I might very well promise to do the commission he wished to entrust to me there, instead of in my own cramped and meagre workshop.

"I expect you take me for a collector in disguise," I said, with a laugh, "and one, moreover, who would even appropriate a photograph; but there will be no difficulty about it. I can assure you I haven't such a room as this to work in at my own place."

But still Mr. Bellamy did not seem quite satisfied. He gazed at me intently, and when he did at last begin to speak, there was a hesitation in his manner, as if he were apprehensive that what he was going to say might give me offence.

"I do not know whether I have made myself quite clear yet," he said. "What I meant was that you should work at the plate continuously after it is once begun; stay here as my guest, you understand, till the last stroke is done;" and when he finished speaking, Mr. Bellamy's manner became more embarrassed than ever.

Mr. Bellamy was quite right in his supposition. I certainly had not gathered from what he had said hitherto that he had intended me to carry out my work under such novel conditions, and I was a bit taken aback. I sat silent for a few moments. The old man's eyes grew more anxious than ever, and a wild gleam seemed to flit over them. "Ah! I see," he cried. "You are thinking about the terms. Of course it will be much more satisfactory to us both to come to a definite agreement. In these days, my dear young friend, the artist must stoop to think of filthy lucre sometimes, or he will run the risk of going to bed supperless."

"Oh, no," I answered, "I wasn't thinking anything about payment. I said I'd leave all such business to your own discretion, and I'm quite willing to do so."

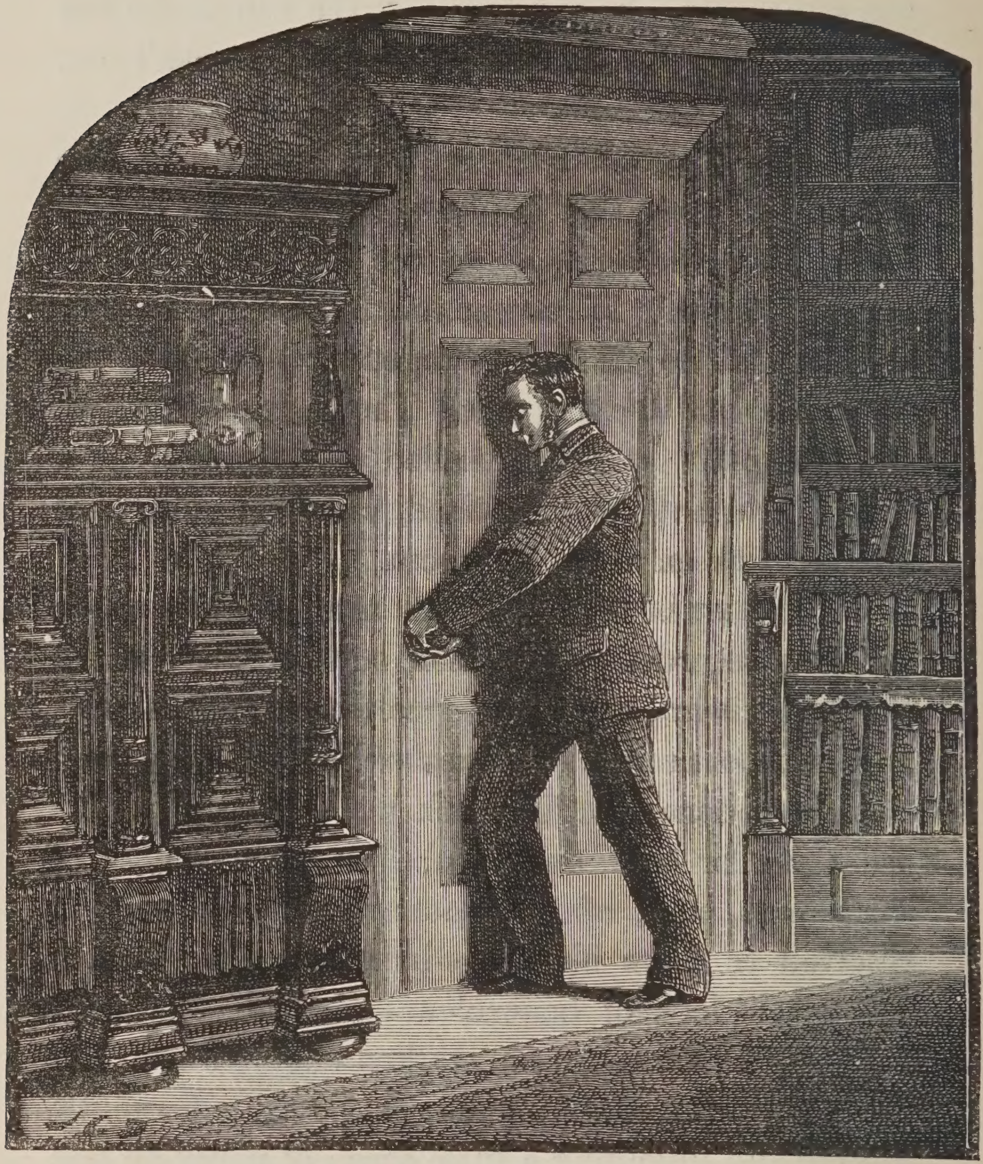
"Ah, now, that is charming," he said in his old manner; "that speech shows that I have inspired you with confidence and created an impression of integrity in your mind; but you must let me have my own way. I will give you fifty pounds for a satisfactory plate, but mind, it must be faultless. You must not mind trying ten or twenty times if you do not succeed. And all the time you shall live here as well as ever you lived in your life."

The sum that Mr. Bellamy named by way of remuneration certainly made me open my eyes. It looked like a decided stroke of luck, but still I hesitated, and a faint suspicion began to rise in my mind. "You need not fear that we shall treat you churlishly," he went on. "We can make our friends pretty comfortable when we try, can't we, Antony?"

I turned round quickly from looking at the picture, and saw that the bow-legged dwarf was in the room, standing close to the old man's elbow. He said nothing in answer to his master's remark, but jerked his head interrogatively towards the corner beyond the fireplace. The old man nodded, and the dwarf at once shuffled off, and opening a door I had not before noticed, vanished into what I took to be an adjoining room.

Something in the old man's manner as he spoke the last recorded words, the sudden presence of the ugly dwarf, and the extraordinary request that I should not recross the threshold I had just passed till I had done a bit of work which might occupy me three or four days, woke in me a feeling of uneasiness, and, after a moment's deliberation, I resolved to leave his commission to other hands. The placid look of benevolence which had hitherto been Mr. Bellamy's most marked characteristic was gone, and he seemed nervous and irritated, rapidly folding and unfolding a little scrap of paper he had picked up from the floor.

"I am extremely obliged to you for your offer," I said at last; "and if I hadn't other work in hand I should have been delighted to accept it, in spite of the strange condition you attach to it. I



I FIND THE DOOR FASTENED.

know lots of men who work as well or better than I do, and if you like I'll mention it to one of them.

And now I think I'll say good night, Mr. Bellamy," I said rising. "Don't trouble to get up; I'll let myself out," and I put my hand on the fastening of the door.

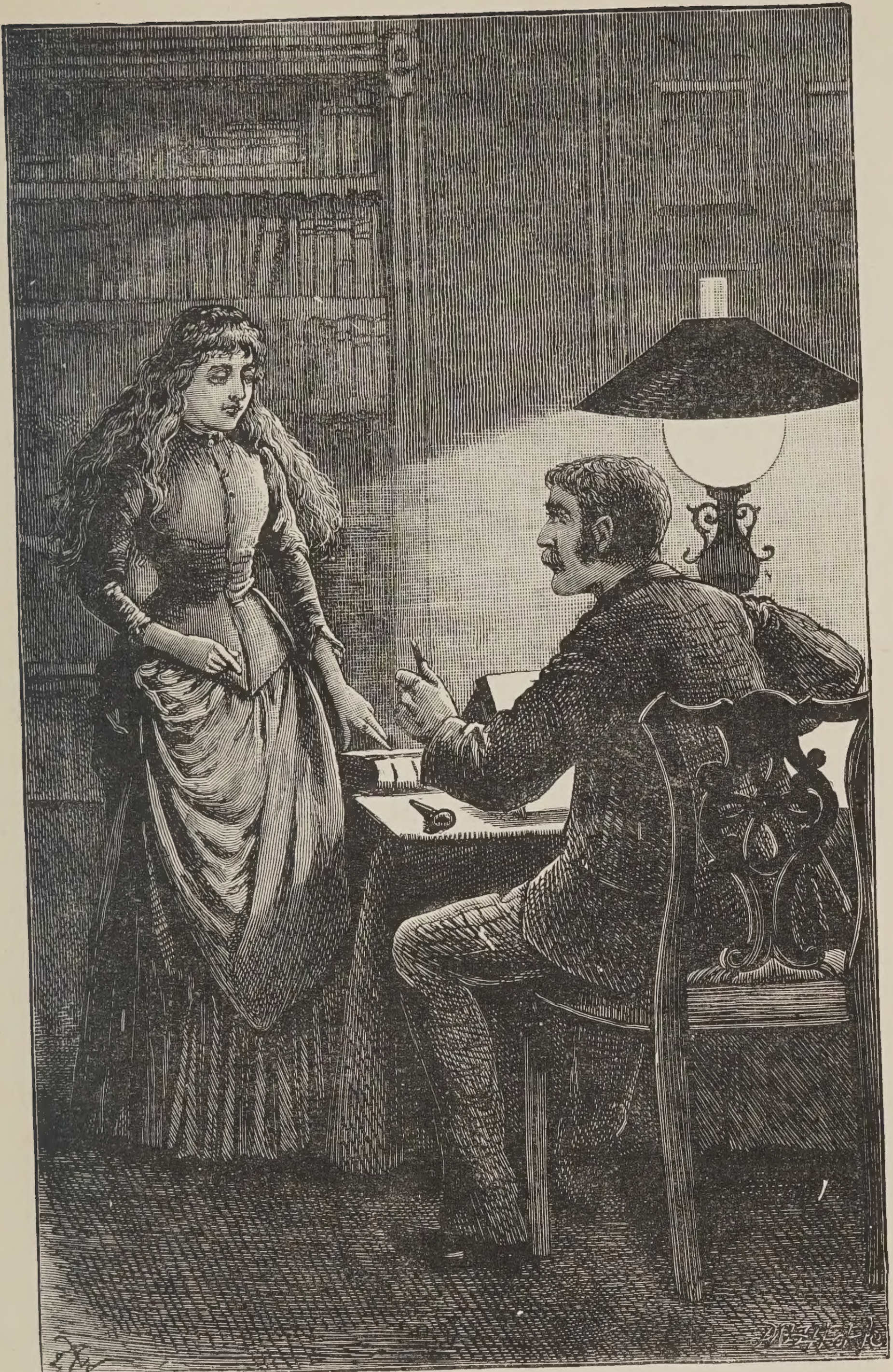
"Stop, stop a minute!" he cried. "I'm afraid you'll find that Antony has fastened that door." I turned the handle this way and that, and soon saw that Mr. Bellamy's supposition was correct. The door was fastened, and this discovery did not tend to restore my composure. "Ah, I was almost sure he had, he's a most valuable fellow, Antony is, but he's full of funny tricks of this sort. If you are really determined not to undertake the work, Mr.——, by the way, it now occurs to me that I don't yet know your name."

"My name is Costello!" I replied.

"Well, Mr. Costello, if nothing I can say can move you, I suppose—but wait a minute, wait a minute!"

Mr. Bellamy spoke these last words in a brisk tone, just as if some fresh idea had suddenly struck him, and was up on his crutches and out of the room in a moment. I, thinking that he was gone to seek the dwarf, sat down to await his return, and again turned over the photographs which I had first examined. I looked at them more critically this time, and the contrast between the early prints and the one which had baffled Mr. Bellamy's skill, struck me as being more marvellous than ever. The old gentleman was certainly right. They were never the work of the same century; after carefully studying one of them for a minute or more, I lifted my eyes suddenly to take another look at the beautiful woman in the photograph which was standing on the mantel-shelf, where I had placed it some minutes ago.

But, before my eyes reached it, they were arrested by another object, one much more attractive than the most lovely pictured presentment of a woman could ever be, one the like of which I certainly never expected to find in this strange dwelling-place. By the corner of the table, just within the circle of light cast by the reading-lamp, stood a tall, slight girl, with fair, smooth face and well-formed regular features. Though the one magic touch which is needed to give a sense of absolute beauty had been withheld, hers was a face which would have lingered long in the memory, even after meeting her in the crowded street; and naturally the impression was far more vivid to me, looking up suddenly in the dusky silence and solitude, and seeing a figure that might just have stepped out of one of Legros' pictures. She was dressed in a plain black gown, and her hair, tied only with a single ribbon, fell in heavy masses on her neck and shoulders. Her eyes were large and dreamy, filled with a look in which wonder and shyness, and a shade of sadness, were



NATHALIE

strangely blent. I saw at once that she had come to speak to me, so I rose and bowed, keeping silence as I did so.

"You have seen my father, sir, and he has been talking to you about some engraving work, has he not?" she said, in slow, hesitating speech.

"Yes," I replied, "Mr. Bellamy has very kindly offered me most generous terms for a bit of work, but unfortunately has coupled his offer with conditions which I find it rather awkward to agree to."

"Oh! and so you cannot help him?" And as she spoke a cloud as of disappointment passed over her face, and her eyes wandered uneasily round the room.

"I fear not. Your father, I think, is gone to see after your servant, who has fastened the door. But perhaps you can show me out this way." And as I spoke I made a motion towards the door. The girl stood between me and the door, and she did not move to let me pass. She even made a slight gesture, as if she would keep me back.

"I hope you will not go away without doing what my father asks you, sir," she said. "He has strange ideas on some subjects, as I dare say you may have noticed, but if he could only get this book finished he might be better. He thinks of nothing day or night but this book of his. Oh, I shall be so glad when he has done with it!"

"But I thought it seemed to be a great pleasure to him; and it certainly is a charming work in itself," I replied.

"To some men it might be, perhaps; but tell me, sir," she said, coming nearer to me, and casting an anxious glance towards the door of the inner room, "do not people go mad sometimes when they keep their thoughts bent on one subject and nothing else? I often fear he will. If that one picture were engraved the book could be printed, and then he could think of something else."

"But there are hundreds of men who could do it for him, just as well as I could."

"Ah but he has made up his mind that you are *the* man to do it, and he would never be satisfied with another engraver's work. He came home from the *café* a few nights ago in such good spirits, and said he had found the man he had been looking for these last six months, and he has just told me your work is the finest he has ever seen.

"If I were to undertake it, I'm afraid I should spoil plate after plate just to make the job hold out," I said. I felt there was the slightest spice of gallantry in these last words of mine, and a moment after, when I looked up full in the girl's face, it occurred to me that the pay was good—extravagantly good—and the work interesting; that there was a touch of romance about the whole business, and that by humouring the old man's fancy I should be doing a kind action by easing the girl's mind of a burthen, the existence of which she had revealed to me by her anxious words. She said nothing, however, nor did she confess by the slightest blush that my words of flattery had touched her. She only raised her eyes wistfully to mine, and played nervously with a bit of string that she held in her fingers.

"Can you tell me," I said, "what reason your father has for not letting any one take that picture away, and why he wants the man who may attempt the work to remain here till it is finished?"

"No, I cannot; at least, I cannot tell you why he would want you to stay here all the time you were doing the engraving. As to that picture, he very rarely lets it go out of his sight, and if he did allow you to take it away with you, I am sure he would be in an agony of fear till you brought it back. And oh! sir, it would be terrible to me if he should be worried afresh about anything. As it is, I am almost driven wild sometimes by his strange anxiety. I cannot think why he is so much more particular about that plate than any of the others. He has engraved it over and over again, but has always destroyed it."

As the girl was speaking, I could hear the old man's voice in the adjacent room. There was another voice—a vulgar-sounding, squeaking one—which I assigned to the ugly dwarf; and, after a little, I became conscious of a third, soft and melodious, speaking in a much lower key than the others, but still much more distinct. The girl glanced anxiously over her shoulder as the sound of voices fell upon her ear. "He will never do it to his liking, I am sure, and the book will craze him. He says no one could do it justice but you. Do try it. As to your staying here, consider that it is only an old man's whim. There is a nice bedroom beyond the studio, and I will see that you want for nothing."

Nothing could have been more artless and sincere than the girl's speech and manner; but, whether it was the simplest nature or the most perfect art, it effected its purpose. I was just about to answer, with more warmth, perhaps, than the occasion demanded, that I would do anything she might ask me to do, when a tall, dark, Italian-looking man entered the room by the door in the corner. His flashing eyes fell first on my companion, but in a moment shifted over to me. He bowed to me with all the grace and deference of a gentleman, and at once began to speak.

"My good old friend tells me he hopes that he has at last found the hand which can put the final touch to his *opus magnum.* He is a little upset just now, for he fears that he may have offended you. So I am come to add my prayers to those of his dear daughter that you will accede to his request. As to your sleeping here all the time, that, of course, is all nonsense to us; but it is something very real to him. If you were to go away leaving the picture half-done, he would work himself up into a fever that you would not come back."

"You are a friend of Mr. Bellamy's, no doubt?" I replied.

"Yes; and I am also his medical man. I have attended him ever since he was paralysed and lost the use of his legs. I am his friend, yes; and I hope ere long to be something more," and as he spoke he cast a tender and languishing glance towards the young girl; but she neither smiled, nor blushed, nor gave any other of those outward manifestations which girls in love are wont to give when such words are uttered by their lovers.

"Ah, I see," I replied; "and you think the worry he feels about this book is hurtful to him."

"Undoubtedly," replied the doctor. "He is, as you must have observed, a man of great reading, and his sedentary habits have certainly injured his health. But there is no hope of getting him to move till this book is out. Then perhaps we may induce him to go abroad for a time. Of course we have not the shadow of a claim upon you; but I ask you of your kindness to grant this request. If the offer he has made does not seem to you liberal enough, he will be quite ready to increase it."

"Oh, the money is ample; and pray assure your friend I am not in the least offended. Of course I was a little taken aback at his request, for it was, as you yourself say, rather a strange one."

"Yes, I quite understand. And so from what you kindly say I gather that I may assure him of your assent. I thank you most sincerely on behalf of us all. Perhaps you would like to make a beginning to-night. I think everything is ready in the studio except the subject," he said, smiling as he glanced at the photograph on the mantelpiece. "A lovely figure, isn't it? I expect you will be fascinated with it yourself before your work is done."

I said nothing in contradiction of the doctor's assumption. As I looked at the girl who had passed behind me, and was now standing near the window, I caught a soft look of thankfulness in her eyes. Even without this, I doubt whether I should have kept up any longer my show of opposition. There was at least an element of romance in the affair, and romance is not a plentiful product in these matter-of-fact days we live in, and the fascination of the girl's dreamy eyes, her strange surroundings, the look of gratitude she had vouchsafed to me, and last, but not least, the apathy or distaste with which she had received the advances of the doctor, all helped to compel my consent. The fifty pounds, too, I will confess, had its weight. I did not earn fifty pounds every week, or every month either. "Would you be good enough to follow me," said the doctor, "and see whether you find everything to your liking?" and as he spoke he led the way through the door by which he had entered. I followed, and found myself in a long room rather narrower than the one I had just left; but furnished in much the same fashion. There was a bright fire burning in the hearth, and the window, like the one in the other room, was covered by heavy dark curtains. The room altogether had a warm and cosy air. There were several carved oak chairs, and a handsome cabinet standing against the wall, and in one corner was the most beautiful old Dutch eight-day clock I ever saw. The face was of brass, covered with a delicately-worked design in white metal, and the case was of black lacquer, adorned with a lot of quaint figures in high gilded relief. It had a cheerful melodious tick, and the tone of the bell as it struck the hour was music itself. In the centre of the room was a table covered with engravers' tools and a fresh plate, and a shaded lamp, all ready for work. This, then, was evidently my workshop, and as I looked around it I told myself that, as far as lodging went at any rate, I should have nothing to complain of.

"There is a bedroom through here," said the doctor, opening a door at the far end, "and I have no doubt you will find all you may want.

Nathalie, dear," he said, addressing the girl who had followed us, "will you tell your father that Mr.——I beg your pardon, I have not yet learnt your name—aha! Mr. Costello, is ready to begin: but stay—just get the photograph out of the next room first."

The girl brought the design, and placed it on an easel under the light, and then left the room by a door leading apparently to the passage outside. In less than a minute I heard the sound of the old man's crutches coming along the passage, and he entered the room.

"I am quite ashamed to look you in the face," he said, with all his original composure restored—"quite ashamed to plead guilty to such an absurd whim; but a fine young fellow like you can afford to humour an old man, just as my good friend Dr. Fabricius does. Nathalie, my child, tell Antony to get some supper for Mr. Costello. He must keep up his strength. A fowl and a bottle of red wine. Will that suit you?"

I made no amendment to this hospitable proposition, for I was hungry enough to have enjoyed a meal of bread and cheese. "I see," he went on, "you have the design all ready, and here is the size; fix it here, just at this corner of the plate. And now I will leave you and go to bed, and if you are wise you will not sit up later than half-past twelve. Good night. And with this he left the room, the same benevolent-looking old gentleman he was when I first met him.

The supper was brought. I soon demolished the fowl, and made a good hole in the bottle of wine which accompanied it, and just as I was about to begin my task Dr. Fabricius entered the room.

"He is quite a new man since the matter has been arranged. I waited till he was settled. You will add years to his life by your kindness, Mr. Costello."

Dr. Fabricius spoke with that melodious "coo" which Italians never lose, even in the longest sojourn amongst northern gutturals and sibilants, and his manner was politeness itself; but I somehow felt an instinctive dislike and distrust of him. From the first moment I set eyes upon him I seemed to resent the freedom with which he took upon himself the management of the harmless old bibliomaniac and his daughter—of his daughter especially, the prosaic reader will say, no doubt. Well, it might have been jealousy, or it might have been something I cannot define. Anyhow, the result was the same. Dr. Fabricius became to me as obnoxious as Dr. Fell was to the young lady of the well-worn rhyme.

"I am glad to hear that," I replied. "It is the first time I ever heard of an engraver being called in to help the doctor."

"Ah! but we physicians are not like you. We do not work under a brilliant lamp. The best of us are only groping in the dark, and often for no reward. Now you, Mr. Costello, will always have the consoling consciousness of a good action performed. You are an unselfish man, I am sure, and I am delighted to have met you. Would there were more of your sort in the world!"

The man's flattery made me dislike him all the more. "You don't know me as well as I know myself, Dr. Fabricius, or you would not talk in that strain."

"You mean that you look for some recompense in all you do? And pray who does not? Show me the man who professes perfect unselfishness, and I will show you a knave. 'Virtue is its own reward.' Bah! If that were so, virtue would soon be as scarce as truffles are getting. But I must not take up your time with my chatter any longer. See, here is some coffee by the fire, in case you should want any. Good night; and, if you require anything else, Antony will be sleeping on a couch in the front room."

Then Dr. Fabricius left me, and very glad I was to be relieved of his presence.

CHAPTER V.

NATHALIE.

WHEN once I was alone with my work, I began to realise fully how strange the situation was, much more like an Arabian night than an English one. Before settling finally, I looked into the front room, and there sure enough was the dwarf sound asleep on a couch. I tried the lock of the door by which I had originally come in, and found it still fastened, as was also the one in the studio by which the doctor had gone out. My bedroom was a small recess, with no exit save the door leading to it by the studio. There was a window, but that was high up over the bed, and guarded by stout bars. I was evidently a temporary prisoner; but I felt no fear as to my personal safety, since I had spoken to the girl, and had learnt from her and from Dr. Fabricius as well the reason of their anxiety to gratify the old man's fancy. I sat down at the table and was soon hard at work.

I set out the design on the reduced scale Mr.

Bellamy had given me without much trouble, and found my task much easier than I had anticipated. I worked till the clock struck two, and then I bethought me of the coffee the doctor had named. I took a cup, and found it excellent—such coffee as I had rarely tasted before. After taking it I did not feel inclined for more work, and remembering Mr. Bellamy's counsels as to late hours, I went to bed.

I cannot say how long I may have slept. When I awoke I judged it to be day from the faint hum of the streets; but there was no more light in my bedroom than that which came in through the door. I got up and found the lamp, which I had extinguished on going to bed, trimmed and lighted, and the curtains drawn back. The lower panes of the window were ground glass, and through those above I could only see the customary black walls and chimneys of the rear view from a London house. Breakfast was prepared on a side table, and having despatched this, I sat down to my work.

I kept at it steadily for a couple of hours and more, for I certainly felt that the work had a strange fascination for me. As the reduced version of the figure of the fair and stately woman advanced towards perfection on the plate before me, it seemed to grow more and more familiar to me, and I instinctively recalled the old man's inquiry of the previous day as to whether I had not seen something like it before. The doctor's words, too, seemed to be in the way of being fulfilled; for I really was becoming fascinated with the grand, calm face which looked down upon me from the photograph on the easel.

But this pictured face, lovely as it was, could not drive out of my thoughts the one in real flesh and blood I had looked at last night. I heard a noise behind me, and started up with a thrill of hope and excitement in my heart, and sat down disgusted when I found it was only the dwarf come to clear away the breakfast. I asked where his master was, for I was getting rather proud of my work, and wanted to show it.

"Mr. Bellamy," he said, "was not feeling very well this morning, and would not be about yet. The young lady was in the front room if I wanted to speak to her."

On hearing this bit of news I felt that the time was come to take a spell of rest. I laid down my tool and went into the front room, and there I found the young girl, Miss Nathalie, sitting by the fire, doing some needlework. The fog was thick outside, and the lamp was lighted on the table, so the aspect of the room was almost the same as when I had come into it the evening before. Nathalie rose as I entered, and with the same half-sorrowful, half-grateful look in her eyes that I, had noticed last night, bade me good morning and hoped that I had been comfortable, and rested well.

"Thank you, I slept splendidly," I replied, "but I was some time before I could remember where I was this morning when first I woke. It was just like a fairy tale."

"And the engraving—do you think you will be able to make a copy of it? It must be very difficult, or my father would not have failed over it so often."

"I hope so; I have got on fairly well up to the present."

"Yes, and if you do fail once, or twice, you will not mind trying again, will you? I know you must think it very strange that my father should want you to stay on here, but I told you the reason; and oh, sir, I should be so grateful to you if you could manage to finish off this book for him; I shall never have a minute's peace until it is done."

"Rest assured, my dear young lady, that I will work for a week rather than run away without satisfying Mr. Bellamy."

"Ah! you are very kind, and I'm afraid I am very selfish."

Nathalie seemed greatly relieved after I had assured her I was willing to try at the plate again and again. Her eyes filled with tears; but when she had dried these she became more cheerful and less constrained than I had ever seen her, and we sat chatting for half-an-hour or more. I soon discovered that she was intelligent and well read, but her nature was evidently cramped by solitude and her strange surroundings. Without being conceited, I was sure she was very glad to have me to talk to. Now that she was quite natural and unconstrained in her manner I marked that her face was much handsomer and more striking than it had appeared to be when my eyes first fell upon it; but still there was something wanting. Though her skin was smooth, and her eyes bright, and her form supple and graceful, though she had all the outward form of youthfulness, the spirit of youth was not there. This was the great charm she lacked; but living the life that she did, there was little wonder that it should be so.

Our conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door, and Dr. Fabricius came in.

"So, Mr. Costello. I am glad to see you looking so well. I have just come from our old friend, and he is very anxious to know how the plate goes on. Have you had good luck with it?"

"You shall judge for yourself," I replied, as I led the way into the inner room.

The doctor took up the plate, and examined it narrowly with a microscope under the lamp.

"Ah, yes; it is first-rate, first-rate. I can be certain so far, ignoramus as I am about engraving. And what progress you have made! You will never repent having taken this job in hand, Mr. Costello. When it becomes known that this is your work, you will have no occasion to ask for commissions."

I took my tool and sat down to work again. Dr. Fabricius watched me for a minute or two, and then left the room. I worked hard for the rest of the day, and, when the clock struck eight, I had very little to do. I saw nothing more of Nathalie, nor of Mr. Bellamy either, till after my tea, when the latter, seemingly quite well, came in, and at once began to congratulate me on my success.

"The good doctor tells me you have succeeded beyond all expectation," he began. "Ah, you remember what we were saying about the consolations of Art the first time we met. Art is like Mercy, it blesses him that gives and him that takes. We two are indeed fortunate. We know a joy that must always be strange to the sordid seeker after gold."

I saw the old man was genuinely pleased with what I had done, so I did not stop him in his rhapsody, though I begun to suspect there was more sound than sense in his words.

"I have all the delight of your perfect work," he went on, "and you, you have the reward of feeling that you have done a kind action, a reward that will last as long as you live, my young friend, long as you live."

As he spoke Mr. Bellamy placed his hand on my shoulder, and the beaming smile rippled over his countenance.

"I think it is about finished now," I said. "It is a mistake to overwork a plate of this kind."

"Yes, I quite agree with you. And, by the by, here is the money," and he counted me fifty sovereigns out of a canvas bag. "And now I will take the plate upstairs just to examine it under a microscope. Will you wait a little in case there should be anything to do in the way of retouch? Here is your supper. Eat it, and enjoy it; though I hope it may not be the last meal you take under my roof."

He left the room, and I, nothing loth, fell to. Half-an-hour passed, and no one came. I took a book, and began to read; but I was soon interrupted by a knocking at the outer door, and the sound of feet and muffled voices in the passage. I was rather astonished at this after the intense stillness that had prevailed hitherto. Almost immediately Dr. Fabricius stole suddenly into the room, and locking the door, made a gesture of silence as he did so.

I saw in a moment from his manner that something was amiss.

"Hush, speak softly," he whispered; "something most unfortunate has occurred. The police are in the house, and have gone up to Mr. Bellamy's room, poor old man! I fear it will be the death of him."

"What is it? What has he done?" I cried.

"Nothing, just nothing: but the bungling fools will do mischief enough themselves, I fear, before they have done. They will give him a shock which, in his present nervous condition, will very likely kill him."

"Why have they come here, then?" I asked.

"Ah, I remember! you have not been out into the world to-day, so you do not know that there was an attempt made this morning to blow up Newgate with gunpowder—the work, so they say, of some of the Fenian brotherhood."

"But, surely, Mr. Bellamy has nothing to do with them?"

"No, nothing whatever," Dr. Fabricius answered, "only unfortunately he has been in the habit of meeting some of these men and their foreign associates at the café that he frequents, and the police have somehow got hold of this information."

"Ah, yes," I replied, "it was the very same place where I first saw him. He told me that most of the men beside ourselves in the room were Nihilists, or Internationalists, or something of the kind."

"Just so. I have warned him over and over again of the danger of being seen in the company of such people," said the doctor in an accent of despair; "but I have no fear of any danger to him except such as I have mentioned. I am not so confident, though, about yourself. From a word that the police inspector dropped I gather that they are come here to search for a young man in whose company Mr. Bellamy was seen at the Circassian Café a few days ago. I fear that points to you. What do you think yourself?"

I started up utterly confounded at these words, and stood for some seconds completely dumb.

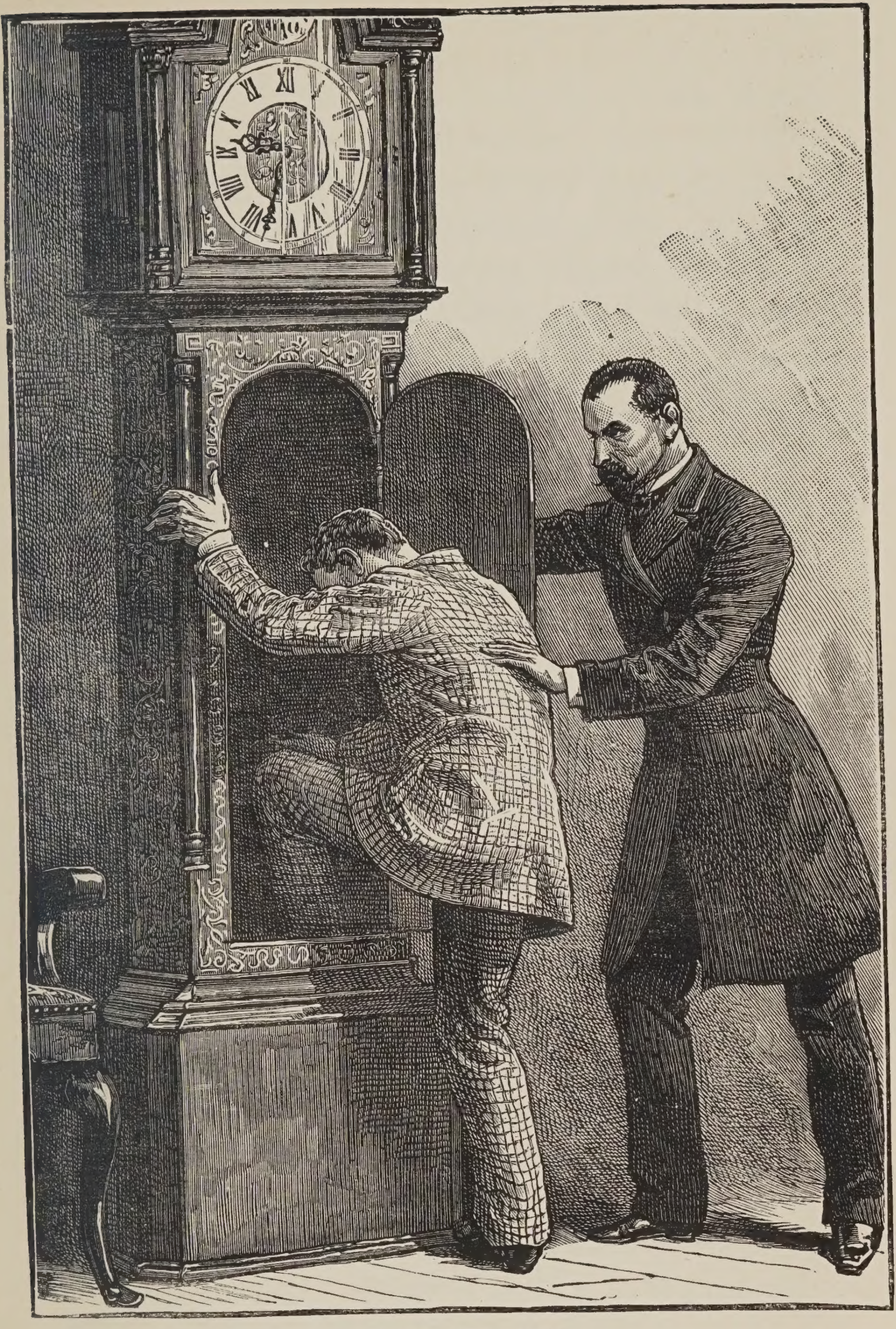
"While they were searching and looking about upstairs I thought it would be only friendly to step down here and warn you," Dr. Fabricius went on. "Of course it is impossible for you to leave the house, as they have placed two men at the door."

A cold shudder came over me as I pictured myself standing in the dock at the police court, charged with an infamous crime. In spite of the fact that I bore an Irish name, I knew that I could call witnesses in plenty to speak to my character, and I felt that no proof existed to link me in any way with the Fenian brotherhood; but for all this I was horribly conscious that, though one may be as innocent as a baby, one never fares quite so well after an appearance at the bar of a tribunal of justice as before. "But they can't want me; they must be looking for one of the regular frequenters of the Circassian Café. I never went into the place till a few days ago—the day when I first met Mr. Bellamy."

"I have not the least doubt that all you say is true as the Bible," said Dr. Fabricius, "but these policemen are pig-headed beyond measure, and the magistrates are worse. The public too is getting angry and alarmed at these continual explosions, and the newspapers are saying that it is high time that the police caught hold of somebody. So these good fellows are going to work with a will, and are not very particular as to the people they seize."

"So they may seize me, you think?" I cried. "Oh, hang it! these fifty pounds will cost me dear if my name gets into the papers. Of course everybody will set me down as a rebel and a murderer, or worse."

"Not quite so bad as that, let us hope," said the doctor; "but, as you say, it is never pleasant even to be charged with an offence of this kind. But let us consider whether there is no way of dodging them. I am afraid they'll search this room, and your bedroom too. What do you think of this, however?" and the doctor as he spoke went over on tiptoe to the old Dutch clock and opened the door of the case. "There's plenty of room for a man or two men even to hide here, and the police will never think of examining such a place. There's



SHUT INTO THE CLOCK.

no time to lose. Look here, leave your work and your tools just as they are, they are Mr. Bellamy's, of course, and get into the clock case. I felt desperate and bewildered at the prospect before me, and grasped at the faintest chance of escape. I crossed over to where the doctor stood holding the door of the case open, and glanced inside. It was a tolerably big closet, in which a man might easily stand without discomfort. I was sure I should be well-nigh ruined if my name—and it must be remembered that Costello is an Irish name—were to be mixed up even so lightly with a Fenian outrage. So I hesitated not a moment to avail myself of the only hiding-place likely to be of any service in the room.

I stepped lightly inside, and the doctor, before he closed the door, called my attention to some perforations in the woodwork which would admit plenty of air.

"They will be here for some minutes, no doubt," he went on, "and as soon as they are gone I will come and let you out. Mind, not a sound if you hear footsteps in the room. Now I must go and see to Nathalie. The poor girl is almost beside herself," and with these words he closed the door. The lock, seemingly a spring one, gave a sharp metallic click, as if it were strong and in good order; a far more efficient lock, indeed, than one finds usually on old Dutch clock cases.

CHAPTER VI.

BURIED ALIVE.

I HEARD Dr. Fabricius close the door of the room, and as all became silent again, a thousand fancies took possession of my brain, and in a minute's time these gave place to fears. It then occurred to me what a short, sharp, vicious snap the lock of the clock-case had given when Fabricius closed it. It is not a pleasant sensation to be shut up in a box with a spring lock, with your release depending on the goodwill of a perfect stranger, a stranger whom you had met under the most peculiar conditions, and one, moreover, who had hitherto not impressed you very favourably; but after a little a reaction came. What harm could happen to me in the house of so kindly a man as Mr. Eugene Bellamy? He was a little cracked, indeed, on the subject of Art and its humanising influences; but then two-thirds of the human race have bees of some sort or other in their bonnets. And then there was Nathalie. That look of gratitude she gave me last night was yet fresh in my memory, and I assured myself that she would not see me in peril without using her woman's wit to help me.

I listened attentively for the door to open and the myrmidons of the law to enter. I speculated as to whether they would examine my handiwork in search of treasonable emblems, and the interval of despondency returning, I wondered if the stately woman I had been drawing might not be some Goddess of Freedom or Spirit of Liberty. A design, perhaps, for the Great Seal of the Irish Republic, but the entire absence of the Hibernian emblems, comforted me. I could swear there was neither a shamrock nor a harp in any part of the plate I had just finished.

Suddenly, as if the vain strivings after identification of the past twenty-four hours had been violently crystallized into coherence by a sudden shock of electricity, my heart stood still, and all my blood seemed to freeze in my veins as I became aware of what I had really been doing since I had been Mr. Bellamy's compulsory guest. In a moment, in the semi-darkness of my strange prison, this frightful recognition came upon me full and clear, accompanied by a feeling of wonder that my senses should have gulled me so long. Over and over again, both in the photograph and in the reduced drawing on the plate, I had been sensible of some glimmer of resemblance to something seen elsewhere; but this glimmer, unhappily, had never been kindled into a perfect light. Too late I knew that the figure I had just finished was no other than the one which may be seen any day on the left hand corner of a Bank of England note, and that I was in the clutches of a gang of forgers!

For a minute or so such a paralysis fell upon my will that I doubt whether I should have been able to step out into freedom had the door of my prison been thrown open. How clearly and fully came back to my recollection all the weird stories I had read about men who had fallen into snares like the one which had now closed over my head, and as I considered these I abandoned all hope that any feelings of mercy would sway the decisions of my gaolers in the disposition of a tool like myself. I had served my purpose, and was no longer of any use; but it would hardly be safe to let me go my way. Before this many a one had no doubt been lured to destruction in like manner, and had never issued alive to tell the world of his adventures. The story of the police being in the house was of course all part and parcel of the trap; and, had I declined to enter the clock-case, another method, less convenient but just as efficient, would have been found to silence me. In the midst of this storm of agitation, I was in a measure recalled to myself by the sound of the clock, which began to strike over my head. I counted ten strokes, and when the ring of the bell had ceased I could plainly hear footsteps in the room, and a bright light shone through the perforations of the door.

By drawing myself up to my full height I managed to bring my eye level with one of the holes, and peered out into the room. There I saw the man they called Dr. Fabricius standing by the table clearing away the engraving tools I had lately used, and almost immediately the old man entered from the adjoining apartment —to my horror and amazement no longer on crutches—but walking with a swift, stealthy tread. He came close to where Fabricius was standing, and the two talked for some moments in a tone too low for me to catch what the words were. Then they both withdrew to the most remote corner of the room and began to turn up the carpet, and when they had rolled this back some distance, so as to leave a large space of the floor exposed, Fabricius, stooping down, took hold of an iron ring, and lifted up what was evidently the trap-door of a cellar beneath.

Strange to say, this movement, suspicious and threatening as it was, kindled in my heart a spark of hope. Perhaps the story about the police might be true after all. Perhaps the old man was really a Nihilist or a Communist, and had been a little too sympathetic towards the high-souled patriots of the Emerald Isle, who even then were making trial of the emancipating virtue of explosives, though in a milder degree than in these latter days of progress.

Perhaps the trap-door they were lifting up was a way of escape contrived in the same ingenious fashion as had made a sort of conspirator's closet out of an innocent-looking Dutch clock-case; but then came the terrible thought that perhaps it was a living tomb to which they were going to consign me, clock-case and all, to starve and rot, and effectually conceal the secret of that fatal plate, and of the image which I, in my ignorance, had engraven thereon.

But I was not long left in doubt. Leaving the trap-door open, they came towards the clock-case, and, standing one on each side of it, pushed it easily from its place. It evidently moved on wheels, and was quite distinct from the dial apparently belonging to it; for I heard the clock strike the quarter in its original situation when I was being moved towards the middle of the room.

Up to this moment I had kept silent and well-nigh motionless; but now the crisis had come to me which comes to the fly in the web when he sees the spider advancing towards him. The fight for life must be made, however desperate the odds against me. I passed my fingers rapidly round the inside of the case to detect, if possible, where the fastening of the lock might catch; but the joinery was so smooth and perfect, that I should never have found it, had not the brass plate of the lock struck cold to my fingers as they touched it after passing along the wood. Then, drawing my legs up till my knees were about level with the lock, and pressing my back against the back of the case, I brought every muscle into play to drive outwards the walls of my narrow cell, caring nothing whether it might give way, front or rear. The violence of my effort tested to the full the handicraft of the man who had put the woodwork together; for it cracked as if it must burst, and the whole thing swayed over, and would have fallen, had not one of the men caught it and laid it down in a horizontal position on the ground.

"Aha! my young friend," said the voice of the old man; "you are tired of standing erect, are you? Well, you shall lie down a little. But he will not have much more walking to do, will he, good doctor?"

While the old fiend was speaking, I was straining every muscle, and the chest cracked again and again. I even felt the panels give way against my knees; but the lock still kept its hold.

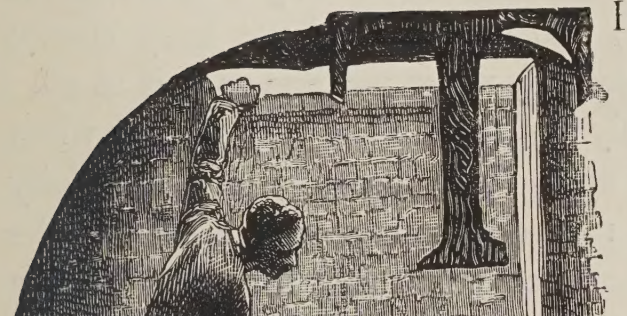
Again and again I put my whole force into my struggle for life, and so blurred and confused did my perceptions become in the agonised pantings and strainings, that I did not realise I was being moved along, until I felt my head sink suddenly. The chest was evidently being lowered down a sloping surface, grating against rough wood in its descent. Suddenly, with a shock, it came to a standstill, and a loud crash overhead told me that the trap-door, which I had seen raised a few minutes before, had closed upon me. Not a gleam of light now penetrated the holes in the chest, and the utter darkness told me the terrific fact that I was lying alive in my coffin in the underground cellar of a forger's den, with no more chance of escape than from an iceberg in the Polar Sea.

The thud of the heavy trap-door fell upon my ear as the final seal of my miserable fate; and in a moment my self-control, which had hitherto stood by me, gave way. Till now no sound had passed my lips. Now I screamed wildly, and kicked with all my force against the bottom and sides of the chest. Soon my knees were gashed and bare, and I could feel the trickle of the warm blood from the self-inflicted wounds. At last exhaustion came, and, after a final effort of despair, my senses left me and I lay unconscious, I know not how long, in my living tomb!

Unconscious! and yet the nightmare phantoms which affrighted my exhausted brain—the horrible dreams I dreamt that night—were vivid and real as no dreams of mine had ever been before. Now I was bird-nesting, or apple-stealing, or wandering along the towing-path of the canal which ran almost at the bottom of the garden of a house my father occupied when I was a schoolboy, or taking a voyage on one of the barges from lock to lock. Now, I was at my lessons, or, more strictly speaking, copying my Latin exercise from my neighbour's book. How plainly I marked in my trance the wen which grew on the head of Mr. Tugford, my then pedagogue. Now I was in my workroom, with my head bent down over some delicate bit of scroll-work background, the lines of which would never fail to gather themselves into similitude of the feline smile of the villainous assassin who had lured me to destruction. Now I was passing through the crowded streets, and upon every face I met I saw the same false, cruel smile. Upon every one?—no. One there was which wore the same look of gratitude—almost of affection—I first saw when I consented to put my foot into the net whose infernal meshes had now closed over my head. Was it real gratitude, or, if real, would it be guiltless? All these images passed before me vivid as life; but there was beneath them all a dreadful semi-consciousness that they only veiled with their trailing garments something more horrible than death itself—the torments of starvation—just as I had heard that a patient under chloroform, in the midst of the narcotic trance, is dimly conscious of what he may be undergoing at the hands of the operator. But it came to an end at last, and I awoke to horror and silence and darkness. Weary as I was, with my brain fit to burst, and every joint stiffened by my violent struggles and my cramped position, every sense was keen and active as ever. I heard the stroke of two upon the bell of the clock in the room above, and soon after something like the scrambling of a rat near my head. In my waking hours and in my strongest health I always had a horror of these brutes, and now this scratching revived in tenfold force my sense of aversion. Now it was scampering about on the case itself—I seemed to feel already the clawing feet in my flesh. Perhaps ere long it might find a way into the case to some purpose. Wild with horror, I drove my fists with all my force against the door, and it flew wide open at my touch.

CHAPTER VII.

SAVED.



A STRANGE FAREWELL.

THE air of the cellar struck cold to my face, and I did not move. The sudden shock, the discovery that I was at least free from the horrible box, was, in its effect, almost as paralysing to my senses, as had been the discovery that I was entrapped. First I lifted my hand, then I drew myself up into a sitting posture, and finally, after a struggle with my cramped limbs, got out of the chest and stood upright on the floor of the cellar. But I was far too weak, too much shaken, to maintain my balance. All the blood in my body seemed rushing to my head. I staggered, and wildly stretching out my hands to save myself, clasped an arm, an arm of soft warm flesh, and in a moment a firm hand was laid on my shoulder, and a whispered hush recalled me to the consciousness that I was as yet by no means out of danger; and that if I did not keep silence I might very possibly never manage an exit at all.

I need hardly say that in the very instant when my hand fell upon that unseen arm, I was fully sensible who my deliverer was. Even in the darkness of that noisome vault I was as clearly conscious of the dreamy pitiful gaze of those wonderful eyes as ever I had been in the room above, when that pale pre-occupied-looking girl had first come in and had spoken those words to me so pregnant of evil.

"Come this way, follow me," a voice said in the lightest whisper, and I felt myself drawn along through the darkness. Probably I did not walk half-a-dozen yards, but it seemed to me like half a mile. Suddenly my guide stopped, and striking a match, lighted a little lamp she bore in her hand. I saw that the place in which we were standing was a vaulted cellar. A heavy door barred our further progress, but Nathalie took from her pocket two keys, one of which unfastened the heavy door, and admitted us into another vaulted cellar slightly smaller than the one we had left. At the end of this was a recess in the wall, covered at the top by falling wooden doors, which were fastened by a bar and a massive padlock. The girl silently brought forward a small empty packing case into the recess, and, standing on this, unfastened the padlock with the other of the two keys. She removed the lock and let the bar fall into her hand; but just as she had done so much the heavy tread of a policeman sounded overhead. She motioned me by a silent gesture to hide the light, and for some minutes she stood motionless and almost breathless. Then, some time after the last sound had died away, she thrust up the heavy door with her arm, and pointing to some holes in the brickwork by which I might mount, bade me, by a whispered word, hasten into safety. She had taken the lamp from my hand, and had quenched its flame; but just overhead there was a gas lamp which poured down a flickering glare into the recess where we stood. I could see the girl's face was agitated, and tears soon began to rise in her soft eyes. As yet I had spoken no word of thanks to her as my deliverer, but now, though I had perished for it, I could not resist the impulse to take her hand in mine and raise it reverently to my lips. She did not resist;

but her hand trembled like a leaf, and she withdrew it, and, with a look of anxious terror in her face, whispered, "Go. Go at once. You are in great danger till you are out of this house. Make haste, for perhaps they will miss me and come to search."

I was young in those days; and many young men, more prudent than I am, in my situation would probably have decided as I did, that prudence for a time must stand aside. I broke out into some wild reckless speech. The girl buried her face in her hands and sobbed convulsively, as I told her how I loved her, and would tear her at any cost from this house of horror. Such agitated tempestuous moments as these come seldom in one's life, and they leave an undying record on the memory. These moments were sweet, God knows how sweet, to me; when, standing at the mouth of this pit of death, that confession, which is made, I trow, to most men sooner or later, was made to me. Surely no man had ever told his love and knew that he was loved in return under stranger conditions. No gentle face covered with blushes, no softly whispered "Yes" assured me of my happiness, but a countenance full of fear and agony for my safety, and a few hoarsely-uttered words, "Go; run from this place as fast as you can. They will kill you if they find you, and I shall be your murderess; but I would die with you."

Thus her secret was told, and all the world knows how men are ever ready to listen to such discourse over and over again; but suddenly the thought flashed upon me that I was guilty of gross selfishness in risking detection, and consequent danger to Nathalie, by delaying my flight. I took her in my arms and kissed her passionately, and then sprang upward into liberty.

I looked around me for a moment or two, and when I glanced back I saw that the heavy falling doors were already closed, and all was silent. But the minute after a light flashed through the glass above the entrance door, and I heard a sound as of bolts and chains being unfastened. I was not out of danger yet, perhaps. There was a light fog in the streets, just enough to make all the houses look exactly alike. I ran down the court as fast as I could, turning now to the right and now to the left in the maze of the streets. I kept on till I was fairly out of breath, and when I stopped I had not the faintest idea where I was, for in the fog the names of the streets I had passed through could hardly have been legible, even had I had time to look at them in my flight from the pursuers whom I figured as following in my track. Suddenly a turning brought me into a street which I recognised as Endell Street, and once that I was in a thoroughfare which I knew my courage returned. I made my way leisurely into Holborn, and there I found a cab to take me to my lodgings.

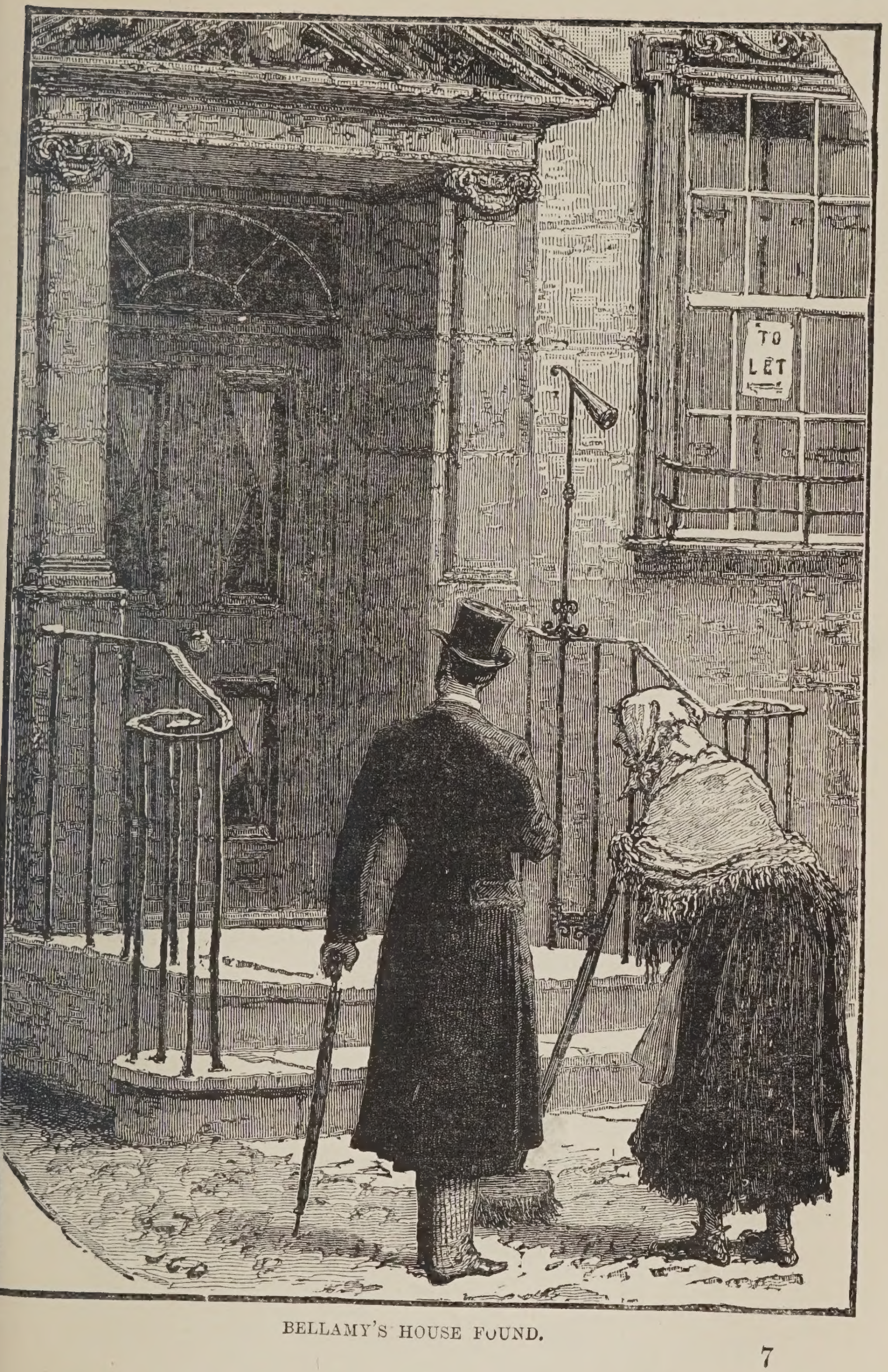
I made no pretence of going to bed that night. The next morning I had to invent an excuse to explain to my landlady my unusual, indeed unprecedented, absence from home the night before; and I went back to my work as if the uneventful round of my days had suffered no interruption; but a man does not enrich his life with an experience like this one I have just described, without finding that grave and deeply-seated changes are the result.

CHAPTER VIII.

A VAIN SEARCH.

IN the first hours of my return to my lodgings, while pacing up and down my room in the early morning; afterwards, when lying awake in my bed by night, or bending over my plate by day, or pacing backwards and forwards through those dreary streets of mid London, in search of the house which had so nearly proved my tomb, I revolved in my mind what was now the question of questions for me. I did not speculate as to how many hundreds of pounds' worth of those fictitious bank-notes, of which I was the unwitting author, had been disseminated amongst the British public, or as to what my would-be murderers said and thought when they discovered my living coffin open and empty. They and their foul deed troubled me very little. I could think of nothing else but that vision of innocence in the midst of crime—that strange, almost solemn, figure of buried youth and half-choked instincts. Such a girl in such a place seemed to me like a fair flower sprung from some chance seed which the heedless wind had flung into some dank, sunless corner of a neglected garden, pallid and strengthless in its beauty, late to mature, and quick to wither. What had her past been like, and what must her future be? The wretches with whom she dwelt had evidently, for some reason or other, kept her in ignorance of their nefarious calling, till by some means she discovered the doom which was prepared for me, and risked her life to save mine. So much for the past. As to the future, I soon made up my mind to strain every nerve and try every plan to find her again and have some part in shielding her from the perils among which she had grown up. I breathed no word of my adventure to a soul; and for several days I was strangely unwilling to set about the fulfilment of my design. At last one day I turned my steps towards the Circassian Café; but, arrived there, I had not the courage to enter; for, with my recollections of it, it seemed to me nothing else than the ante-chamber to the pit of death. At length the door opened and a man came out, and then I could see the place was empty, so I went in and asked the waiter whether the lame old gentleman with the white beard had been there lately.

"No," he replied as he shook a table-cloth in my face. "I haf not seen him dese dree vour day."



BELLAMY'S HOUSE FOUND.

"Has he been in the habit of dining here long?" I asked.

"Oh yes, for a year or more; and he nefer missed a night. De oder ghentlemen he talk mit, dey comm chust de zame."

I did not wait to pursue my interrogations further; but in three days' time I returned and received the same reply from the waiter. The old gentleman had not been to the Café again.

Then I felt sure that my rescue had been discovered, and that the confederates had taken alarm; perhaps were even now out of England. I had an indescribable aversion to place the matter in the hands of the police, and I resolved at least to discover by the process of exhaustion the position of Mr. Bellamy's residence. I bought a large scale map of London, and explored every alley and court lying within the bounds of the district which I felt sure must contain the house I was seeking. At last, after spending a dozen evenings in tramping through the mire and gloom of the sordid streets, I found myself in a court which I recognised at once. I hurried on, and there surely enough was the triangular space at the end, and there, too, was the very house, with the handsome semi-circular light over the door, with all its shutters closed, and a handbill in one window announcing that it was "To Let."

I took a survey of the neighbouring houses.

They were all of a greatly inferior type, with brass plates of different dimensions dotted about the door, and multitudinous bell-handles on every door-post. Seeing an old woman pottering about the threshold of one of them, I went up to her and asked her how long the house opposite had been vacant.

"Och sure, sor," she replied, "it's jist a fortnight or maybe three weeks since the lame ould gintleman, God bless him! went away one mornin', and nobody has set eyes on him since. And three days after a broker's cart came and took away arl the sticks o' furniture."

"And the young lady and the dark gentleman—are they all gone as well?"

"I niver see no dark gintleman; but there was a slip of a colleen with the ould man when he went away. Ah, sor, it's many a sixpence he has given to me and other poor critters as well. May the saints help him wherever he may go."

"Do you know the name of the broker who took away the furniture, or the landlord to whom the house belongs?"

"Sorra a bit. Brokers and landlords are mighty hard on poor folks like me. Ah! the swate ould gintleman, with his white hair and poor crippled legs! I'll never have another bit o' silver from him, worse luck; but maybe ye'll be seein' him soon, and av ye do, tell him that poor ould

Betty's cough is as bad as iver, and that she's powerful bad o' the——"

I cut the old woman's story short by giving her the sixpence, and probably I was at once elevated in her estimation to a moral level with Mr. Bellamy. I took the number of the house, and ascertained from the rating authorities the landlord's name; but here I was brought to a dead standstill. The landlord knew nothing more of Mr. Bellamy than that he took the house three years ago, and had always paid his rent in advance. He was sorry to lose such an admirable tenant, and would be much obliged to me if I could find him another as good.

I went to a private inquiry office and put the affair into the hands of an agent. He traced the goods which had been taken from the house to the store of a certain furniture broker; but that was not the same thing as tracing Nathalie. All farther clue was lost; and the agent, like an honest man, told me that I should be throwing away to no purpose any more money I might spend in the case.

Still, I did not lose heart, nor relax my investigations. I gave up my Camberwell lodgings and took others near Leicester Square, so that I might spend all my evenings in groping about the foreign quarter of London, in the hope of meeting either Mr. Bellamy or Dr. Fabricius; for

I was persuaded that they had not moved far when they left their late habitation.

Week after week, and month after month, I spent my evenings in patrolling the pavement of Leicester Square, and threading my way about the narrow winding courts of the quarter in search of Bellamy and his confederate, but not a single face I met bore the least resemblance to either one of them. I went often to a news-room, and there I would scan every paper to find some scrap of intelligence which might put me on the scent, but for weeks I came upon nothing to reward my search. At last, one day, under the heading of Liverpool, I read the following paragraph:—

" Arrest of Bank-note forgers. For some weeks past the police have been on the look out for certain individuals who have succeeded in putting into circulation in Liverpool a large quantity of spurious five and ten-pound Bank of England notes. On Friday last, a tall, dark man, speaking with a slightly foreign accent, entered the shop of Mr. Williams, clothier, in the New Road, and purchased a pilot coat for two pounds, tendering a five-pound note in payment. He received the change in gold, and left the shop, but immediately afterwards Detective-Sergeant Sampson entered, and requested to see the note which Mr. Williams had just taken. It proved to be, as the intelligent officer had suspected, a forged one. The next day the dark man and his confederate, an elderly man, seemingly of inferior position, were arrested on the deck of the steam-ship *Black Swan*, just as she was about to leave the river for New York, and a large number of counterfeit notes were found on them. The dark man was identified as a Maltese of the name of Melzi, who had formerly practised as a quack doctor in London. The other is an Englishman, and gives the name of Lucas. The two men were taken before the magistrate at once, and on the evidence then produced were committed to take their trial at the forthcoming assizes. We would warn our readers to examine narrowly any Bank of England note that may be tendered to them before they accept it, as the forgery we have just alluded to is a very clever one. The lettering is exact, and the figure of Britannia at the left hand corner is so finely executed that no one but an expert could detect any difference between it and the genuine design."

In a moment I knew that at last my hand was on the clue; but I felt that I must act with caution. I had some thought at first of communicating with the police, but I soon saw that I might have questions put to me which it would be extremely inconvenient to answer; and a Liverpool jury might be sceptical as to my innocence of the real nature of the task I had undertaken, and it might end by my standing beside Mr. Bellamy and

Dr. Fabricius in the dock. So I resolved to trust to my own wit. With my love for Nathalie, and my fears for her safety—which I could not beat back—it was not likely that I should suffer the grass to grow under my feet.

I made inquiries at once to learn the date of the next Assizes, and, two or three days before the commission opened, I went down to Liverpool. The first step I took was to go to the brokers of the steam-ship *Black Swan*, to try and ascertain whether any other tickets, besides those of the two men arrested, had been taken for that particular voyage to New York.

The clerk consulted his passenger list, and then said:

"Yes; I find three saloon tickets were taken at the same time, for Mr. and Miss Lucas and Mr. Paul Melzi; but, as I dare say you know, Mr. Lucas and Mr. Melzi didn't make a start."

"But was the other berth taken? Did Miss Lucas go by the *Black Swan?*" I asked.

"No! But by the rules of our company all these tickets will be available by the next boat. I don't suppose, however, the two gentlemen will make use of theirs."

I left the office with a lighter heart. At any rate, she was alive and, presumably, unharmed. I was freed from the horrible dread that the wretches had discovered the service she had done me, and sacrificed her to insure their own safety. I was certain, too, in my own mind, that she was still in Liverpool. She was helpless and homeless. What would become of her if her father should be convicted of the charge upon which he was to be tried? Find her I must. I resolved to be present at the trial in court, in the hope of seeing her; and if I did not find her there, I would ask for an interview with the old man himself.

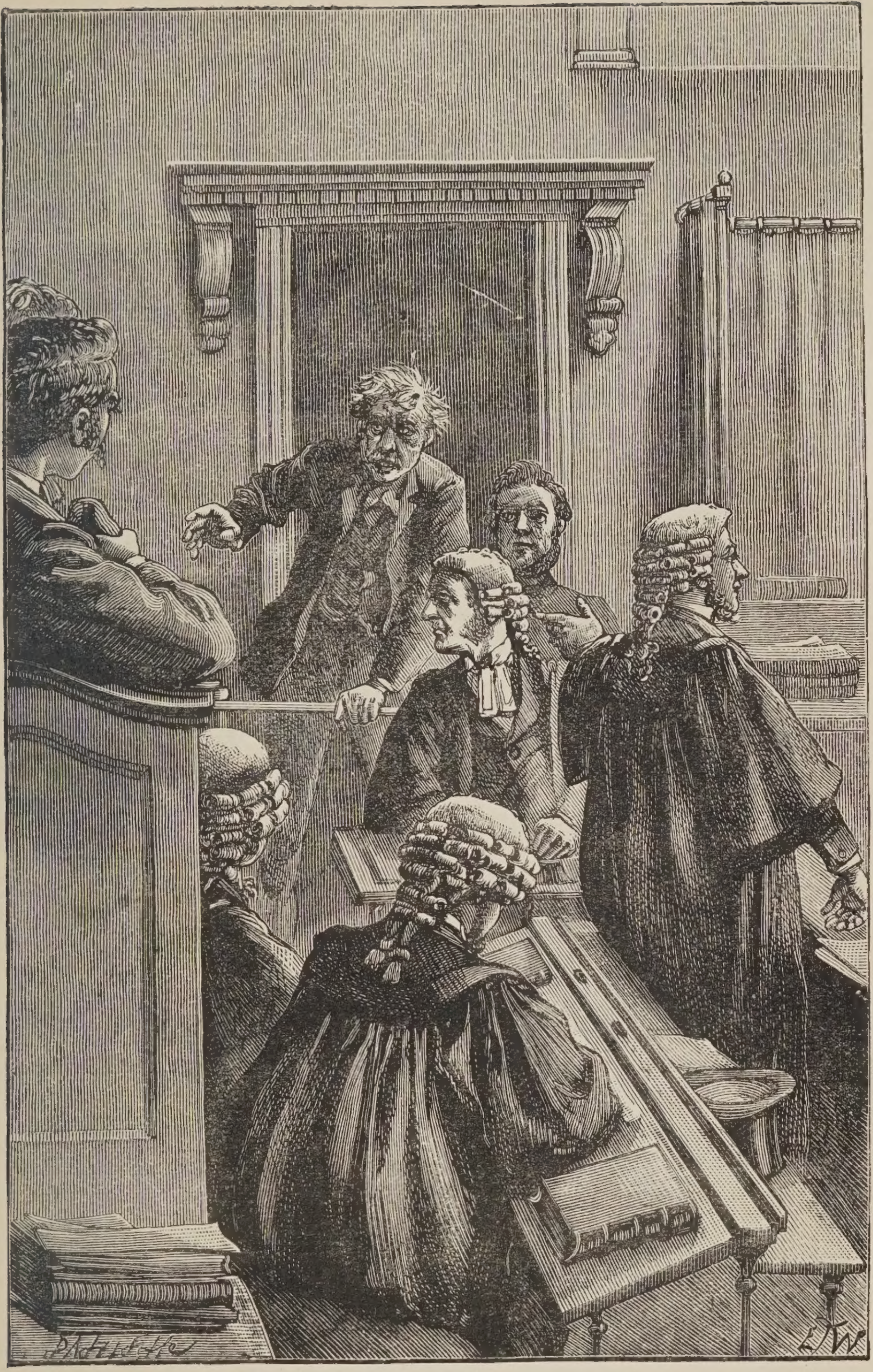
CHAPTER IX.

THE TRIAL.

THE trial of the two forgers was set down for hearing on the first day of the Assizes. I was early at the doors, and easily secured a place in the front row of the public gallery. There were very few women in the place, and not one who could by any possibility be the one I was in quest of.

As I sat in the dingy Court, watching the officials making their final dispositions, and the barristers' and solicitors' clerks bringing in their bags and sheaves of documents, doubt began to assail me. The men I was seeking were not the only bank-note forgers in England; and, strong as was the circumstantial evidence furnished by their nationality and the presence of a daughter in their projected trip across the Atlantic, I might well be mistaken.

I had almost discounted my failure, and was beginning to make my plans for a fresh start, when the movement in Court and the entrance of the Sheriff told me that my period of suspense was near its end. The prisoner in the first case pleaded



THE TRIAL.

guilty; the second was the one in which I was interested.

I do not know whether to call myself a coward or not. I suppose I must have a craven drop somewhere in my veins, for I most certainly felt a thrill of terror as the officer called out the names of Henry Lucas and Paul Melzi. I fancy it must have arisen from the horror of association rather than from physical fear—from the thought that perhaps I was about to be close to, and look into the faces of, the men who, a few weeks ago, had devoted me to a slow and torturing death—to see and be seen of them. The officer's voice had scarcely ceased when the first of the prisoners stepped into the dock, and I recognised in a moment the dark and sinister countenance of Fabricius.

His appearance was scarcely changed at all; but Bellamy's long hair and beard were shorn, and with his shaven chin and clipped moustache he looked as fierce and restless as a hunted wolf. No one would have recognised in him the calm and benevolent sage of the Circassian Café. I kept my eyes fixed steadily on his face, but he did not recognise me till the counsel for the prosecution had almost finished his speech. Then I noticed that he started violently, and a few minutes after he pointed me out to his solicitor, who was seated just below the dock.

The trial was a very short one. The evidence for the Crown was overwhelming, and there was virtually no defence. As soon as the foreman pronounced the word "Guilty," I made my way out of Court; but immediately I issued forth I was stopped by a man, apparently a messenger, who asked me to call on a matter of urgent business that same evening at an address he gave me.

I at once associated this message with the communication I had seen pass between Bellamy and his solicitor, and I resolved to call at the address given; but I had another matter to attend to first.

I asked the policeman on duty in the entrance-hall whether the friends of prisoners just convicted would be allowed admission to the gaol.

"After five o'clock you can leave your name with the head turnkey, and let him know who it is you wish to see."

"And is it absolutely necessary for everybody to go to the head turnkey?" I asked.

"I don't know no other way myself," said the policeman snappishly; "and you'll be very clever if you can find one;" and here he turned away to answer some other interrogations.

I had learnt all I wanted to know. At half-past four I took up my station opposite the great gates of the prison to watch for some one who I felt sure would come. A romancer might have written a volume of stories about the imaginary errands of the melancholy crew that passed me on their way to take a farewell to their unfortunates whom the law had at last gathered into its avenging grasp. First came a little girl with an old wizened face, wretchedly clad, but impudent and self-confident as a woman of forty. She rang at the door quite familiarly, and made her request known to the porter with a knowing grin. Then came a tall old man, evidently a gentleman, with fine, clear-cut features, leading a lady in deep mourning, and closely veiled. Then a red-faced muscular Irishwoman, howling and sobbing, after the demonstrative fashion of her race. Then a farmer-like man, with a wooden look upon his impassive face. A dozen must have passed in before the clock struck five, and I was beginning to doubt; but the last stroke had scarcely sounded when a slender figure, clad in black from head to foot, passed through the circle of light that fell from the lamp over the prison door.

Though the face was veiled I knew at once that it was Nathalie. I drew behind the angle of the house, in front of which I was standing, as she approached the door of the gaol. It opened, and closed behind her, and in spite of the rather suspicious looks of the constable on duty I kept my post of observation till she should reappear.

The moments crept slowly on. Six o'clock struck upon the clanging bell above, and I had already marked the exit of all those I had watched enter save one. At last the heavy door swung back once more. The slim figure glided forth and walked rapidly away, but before she had gone twenty yards I was beside her.

"Nathalie!" I cried; "thank God I have found you!" She stopped at the sound of my voice, and uttered a faint cry. "You are alone in the world now; but you will never be without a friend while I live, I, who owe you life and everything."

I took her by the hands, and she began to sob violently, and was soon in a paroxysm of hysteric grief. I led her aside up a by street, and we walked along in silence, broken only by her sobs, till we came to an open place, where a large space had been cleared for rebuilding. The workmen had left, and it was now all quiet, and I prevailed upon her to sit down upon a heap of planks.

"Do not be distressed. I know everything; how you were as much a stranger to all that went on in that house as one of those children playing there. Nathalie, you know how I love you. You will come with me now, dear, and I will take you to a place of safety till I can make you my wife."

She shuddered, and drew away from me as I approached her. "Ah, no!" she cried, in gasping terror. "Say no more such words as those. You are mocking me."

"Mocking you, Nathalie? I loved you the first minute I saw you, and every hour that has passed since then my love has grown stronger, till now I could not live without you."

She drew her veil aside. There were traces of tears on her face; but it was calm now, and she looked steadily at me with her deep dreamy eyes. "You are good and noble, and because I was young and lonely you pitied me; but you cannot love me—the child of the man who sought to murder you."

"Nathalie, let us forget all that night as a hideous dream, except our farewell. You would have risked your life, I know, to save any one; but unless you had cared a little for me you would not have let me speak to you as I did."

She cast down her eyes, and a crimson blush overspread her cheeks.

"Nathalie," I went on, "you shall believe me, and you shall not cast aside my love. Your parentage—your whole past, you must forget. No two people in the whole world are so fitted to come together as we are, for we are both alone. You are not more solitary than I am."

Nathalie rose and put her hand on my arm, and a sad smile floated over her face as she spoke.

"You are grateful to me for the service I was able to do you. You pity me and—and perhaps you even love me a little. If you do, I thank you with all my heart."

"Dearest Nathalie, how can you thank me so well as to give me what I desire more than anything in the world—your own sweet self?"

"Ah, no! That would be a base and selfish return, indeed, to suffer you to join your life with mine, and to take for your wife the daughter of the man who would have killed you. Oh, God! yours must be a noble and generous heart, that you do not suspect that I myself was concerned in the wicked plot against you."

"I should as soon doubt my own existence as your truth, Nathalie. But tell me something of what your life has been."

"Very few girls have passed so strange and lonely a youth as mine. Six years ago we were living in poor lodgings in Lambeth, and were very badly off. My father used to be away from home all day long, attending to some business in the City, but after he made the acquaintance of the man who called himself Dr. Fabricius he seemed to be better off, and we moved into the house to which you were brought. My father always had been in the habit of spending his evenings in engraving, and now he did little else, as he had apparently lost the use of his legs, and only went out to the café in the evening. Fabricius almost lived with us, but occasionally he would be absent for weeks at a time, and I always noticed that after his return money would be more plentiful.

Indeed, my father seemed to be now well off, though he never went to any business. He was very fond of pretty things, and I am sure he often spent more than he could afford on bronzes and etchings. Of course, I often used to talk to him about his engraving work, and he always told me, as he told you, that he was engraving plates for a reprint of an old manuscript, by which he hoped to make a great deal of money. That was all I knew about the work. You do not think I was in their secret, do you?" she cried, in an anxious tone.

"No need for you to ask that question, Nathalie," I replied; "but tell me about that awful time. How did you know of my danger, and how were you able to release me?"

"I went to bed early that night, but for some reason I could not sleep. A feeling of restless fear took possession of my mind, and I lay awake imagining all sorts of evil things would happen to us. Then I heard a dull, heavy sound downstairs, and soon after footsteps on the stairs informed me that my father and Fabricius were going to bed. I think after this that I must have fallen into a light sleep; anyhow, I was soon aroused by what seemed to me to be a piercing shriek, as of some one in agony; but when I awoke all was silent, silent as the grave. I felt, however, that I must go downstairs to see whether anything was amiss. I struck a light, and crept down the staircase; but all was still. I could not pass beyond the entrance-hall, as my father always locked all the doors at night. I listened attentively at the door of the room in which you were working, and I was sure I heard again a cry of pain, just the same as I had heard in my dream, only fainter. I felt that I must search further, so I stole upstairs to my father's room. The door was always ajar, and a light burning, and I entered without making any noise. I took the keys and withdrew, without awaking him, and in a minute was standing in the back-room. Scarcely had I entered before I heard the strange cry again, and this time it sounded as if it was under my feet. Then I noticed that the carpet had been disturbed, and, on drawing this back, found the trap door of the secret cellar. I knew nothing of this back cellar. I had indeed noticed a door leading from the one we used, but my father told me that it was bricked up on the other side. A few seconds after this you were free. That is all I have to tell you."

As she finished, Nathalie moved a little away from me, as if she wished to end our interview; but I caught both her hands in mine.

"My darling, I could as soon suspect an angel from heaven; but you must put aside all these foolish fears. Nothing in the world could make you anything but a worthy wife for the noblest man.'

She shook her head mournfully; but I could see she was powerfully moved.

"No, nothing can wash out the stain. I will love you and bless you as long as I live for the ray of light you have shed over my life; but you must go your way and forget me. You are a man with a career before you, and association with one like me would only ruin your life. With a woman it is different. What is a life like mine worth? The world will be no poorer for its loss, nor have I any wish to prolong it."

"Oh, Nathalie! words like these cut me to the heart, when I know that I could make your life bright and happy if you would only let me—but you are unstrung and excited now. Let me take you to your lodgings. I will see you again to-morrow."

She allowed me to lead her away from the place where we had been seated, and told me the street and the number where she was lodging. I left her at the door, and promised to call the next morning.

CHAPTER X.

MY FRIEND BELLAMY'S LETTER.

I MADE my way at once to the address which the messenger had given me as I was leaving the Court, and found it to be a private house with a brass plate on the door, setting forth the fact that "Mr. Charles Romer, Solicitor," lived there. I rang several times in vain, but at last the door was opened by a manifest maid-of-all-work, who informed me that Mr. Romer was gone " up town," and that if I had business at the office I had better call in the morning.

I was very impatient to know what could be the purport of this business, and did not relish the prospect of waiting so long. I asked the young woman whether Mr. Romer would be back that evening, or whether he had not left a letter or a message for Mr. Costello; but she was, willingly or unwillingly, imperturbable, and repeated her formula that if I had business at the office I had better call in the morning.

I passed a restless night. What little sleep I had was marred by disturbing dreams. By nine o'clock I was at Mr. Romer's office, and as soon as that gentleman had satisfied himself as to my identity, he handed me a letter. The delivery of this, he remarked, was all the business he was to transact with me.

I broke open the envelope at once, and found that it contained several enclosures. I began with one, a letter addressed to me in full, and read as follows:—

"My Dear Mr. Costello,—I don't know whether you are a student in epistolary literature; but if you are I'm sure you will admit that two correspondents never stood in stranger relation to each other than we do. When we last parted I scarcely hoped ever to address a letter to you again; but the conditions of that interview were somewhat painful, so I will have done with it at once, and pass on to the matter I want to lay before you.

"I was a little surprised when I recognised you in Conrt, and I appreciated most thoroughly your kindness and delicacy in not volunteering to furnish the jury with any particulars as to our past dealings. You had tasted my hospitality, and you declined to appear as a witness against me. I appreciate your good feeling, Mr. Costello—I do indeed.

"You are aware that I and my friend and late medical attendant are now provided for by the State for a period of years, a period which will see me, I trust, transported to another sphere, far removed from the turmoil of this world. You may therefore dismiss us from your mind with what charity you will; but remember that self-preservation is the first law of Nature. In another and more perfect society altruism may find its due place. At present it is rather at a discount.

"It is on behalf of the girl, who has ever been as a daughter to me, that I plead your consideration. She is young, helpless, and absolutely ignorant of the world; and, whatever I may be, I am not brute enough to let her face the perils, which must beset her, unaided, without making one effort to help her. She is, however, no daughter of mine. She was born at H——, in Sussex, and there she lived with her parents till they both died suddenly when she was three years old. Her mother was a distant cousin of mine, and on her deathbed had desired that I would see after the child's welfare. I committed her to the care of some good people in Croydon, named Cullum, as I was at that time engaged in strictly regular pursuits in London; and when she left them I took her to live with me, and never let her know that she was not my own daughter.

"There is a sum of money deposited in her name at the Metropolitan and Provincial Bank, and this you can use in furthering her interest and giving her a start in life. I have full confidence in your integrity after what has passed between us. She is living at No.——, N—— Street, Liverpool.

"I enclose with this the address of the people with whom she lived in Croydon, and copies of her birth and baptismal certificates."

* * * *

Deep and weighty as were the issues dealt with in this strange letter, I could not repress a smile at the imperturbable impudence and *sang froid* of the writer. I soon forgot this, however, and all other considerations in view of the one supreme fact which the letter disclosed, that Nathalie was not, as she deemed, the child of this convicted felon, and that I might go to her triumphant with this good news in my mouth, and banish for good and all the chimera which haunted her and thrust its hateful, estranging shadow between us.

I went with all speed to Nathalie's lodgings.

"A young lady, Miss Lucas, is lodging here," I said to the landlady, who opened the door.

"Yes, sir, a young lady with that name on her box were here yesterday; but she went away soon after seven this morning."

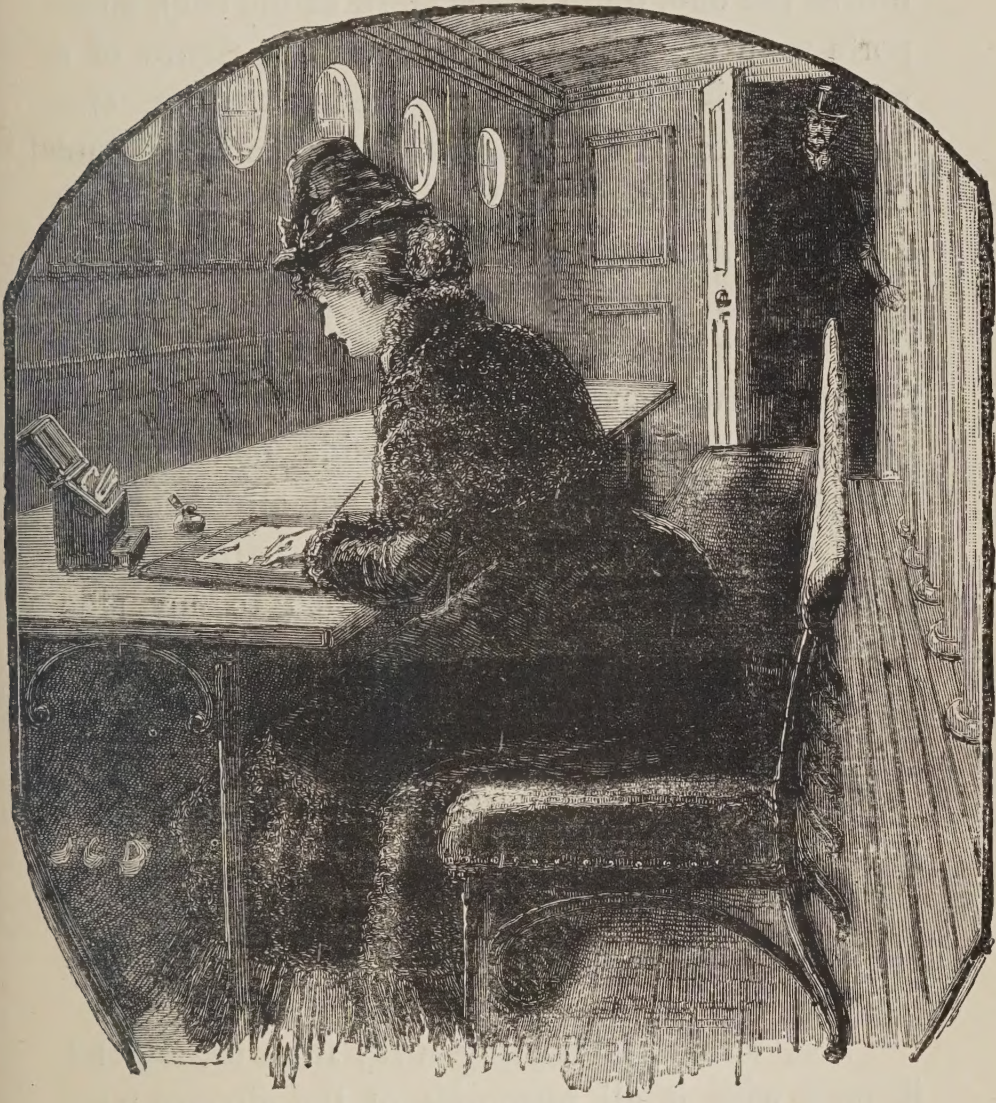
"Gone! And did she go to the railway, or the steamboat, or where?" I cried; "and did she leave no address?"

"No, sir; she went away, and just had a man with a hand-truck to take her box. I never even noticed which direction she took."

This last disappointment was a cruel blow. The old story—a few hours too late. Here I was, standing dazed and stunned, with the talisman in my hand which was to have worked my weal in a moment, now futile as the scraps of waste paper which the winter wind was chasing along the ugly street; two lives wrecked, and destined to bear their burdens in solitary pain. I turned away from the door crushed and hopeless, recking nothing which way I should turn my steps. I made my way, without definite purpose, down to the docks, and as I went along I began to speculate as to the motive which could have driven Nathalie to this strange and sudden flight. Could it be that she really loved me with the whole strength of her nature, and feared that, should we meet again, her love would overpower what she held to be her duty, and lead her to do me the fancied evil she had spoken of last night? I could think of no other reason. But the motive now mattered little to me. If it were as I suspected, my loss was all the more cruel.

On turning a corner, my eye fell upon a shipping placard, and on it I read the words, "*Black Swan*, Liverpool to New York, December 3rd;" and under it, "*Black Eagle*, Liverpool to New York, January 5th." In a moment I recalled my interview with the shipping agent, and my inquiries as to the *Black Swan*. Now he had told me that berths taken on the first-named vessel would be available by any subsequent steamer, and the day of sailing, January 5th, this very day. Could it be possible that Nathalie had resolved to put the wide Atlantic between herself and the land of her sad associations. I flew rather than ran along the wharves till I came to the one where the ship I was seeking was moored. The cranes were still clanking and rattling, and the decks of the steamer were alive with sailors and dock labourers. The volumes of black smoke surging up from her funnels told me that the hour of her departure was approaching.

I went on board, and in the hurry and bustle which prevailed was allowed to pass wherever I liked. I asked a steward whether any passengers had yet come on board, and received a hurried answer that he believed some of them had; but he hadn't had time to look after them yet.



IN THE SALOON.

I made my way down into the saloon, which was in semi-darkness—a long, narrow strip of space; but at the end, quite at the stern of the ship, some ports were open, and I could see the figure of a woman sitting at a table, apparently writing. Her back was towards me, and amid the noise and tnmult on the deck above, I was able to steal up to her unobserved. When I was within a few yards of her she slightly turned her head, and a thrill of joy shot through me as I recognized the face of the woman I loved.

The next moment I was beside her. A few passionate incoherent words were all that was necessary to clear away the hateful barrier which stood between us. As she nestled to my side unresisting I asked her:

"Nathalie, dear, what is the letter you were writing?"

"I was writing a farewell to you. Shall I read you what I have written?"

"No need for that now," and I took the letter and tore it in shreds and cast it into the turgid flood below.

"See, love, it is floating away from us, and let it take with it all memories of the gloomy past To-day our new life begins."

THE END.

Edinburgh, August 1886.

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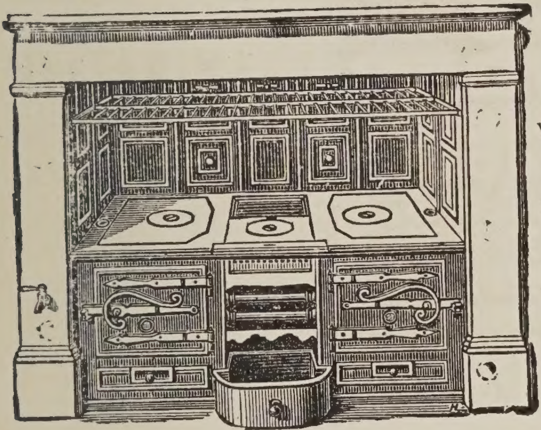

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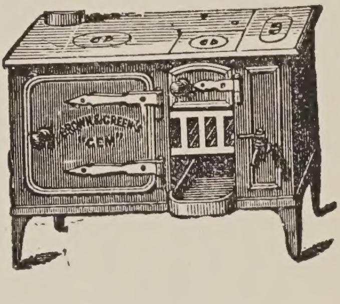

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